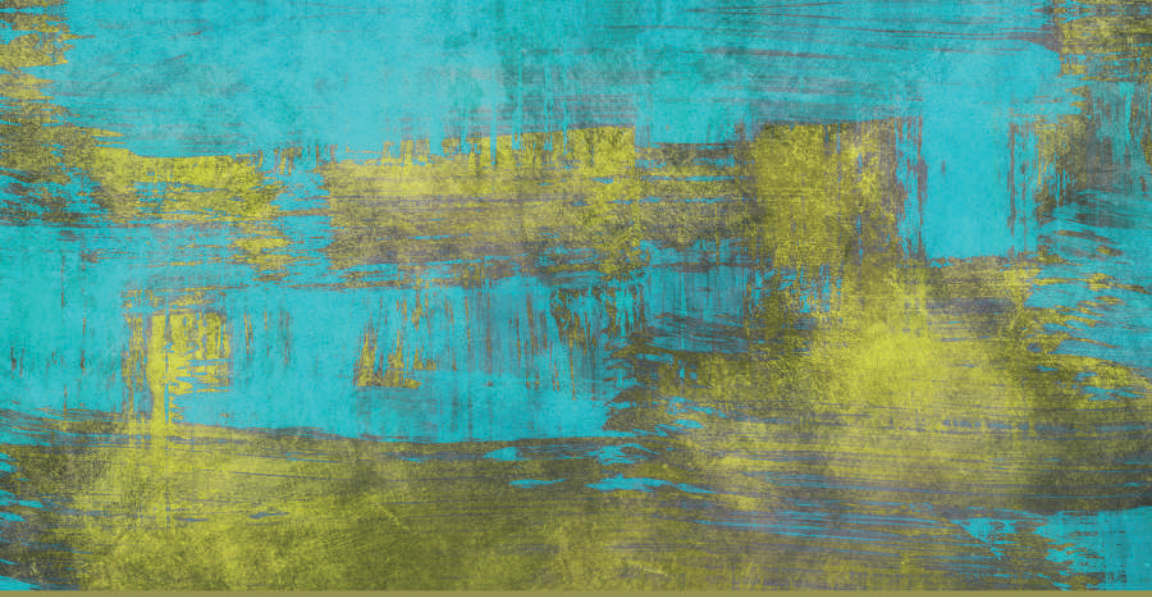
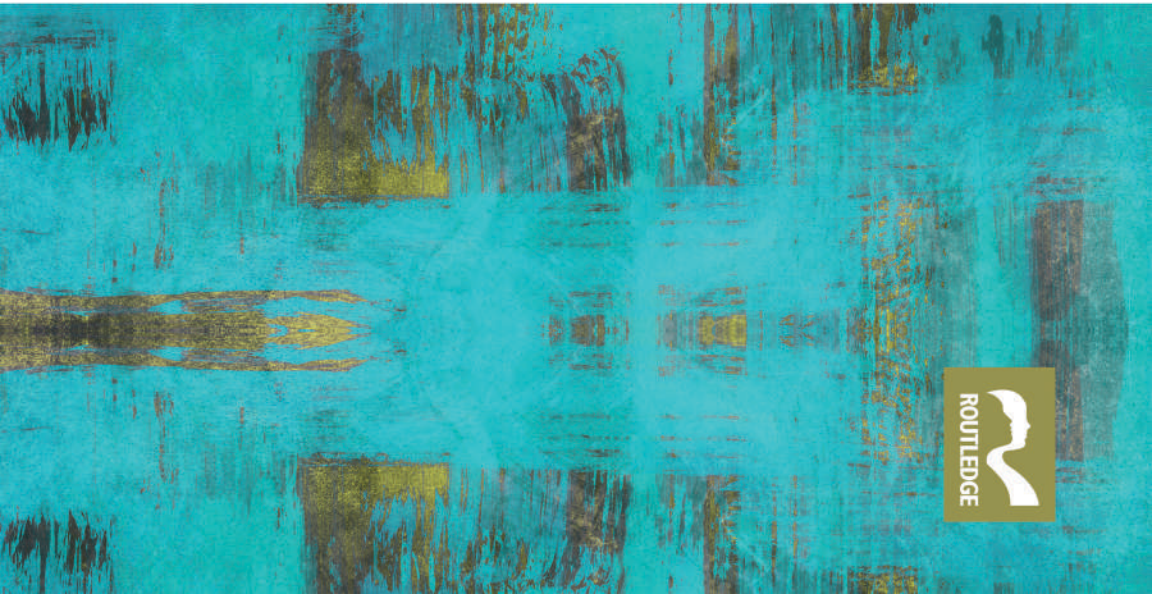


Routledge Studies in Eighteenth-Century Philosophy

HUME AND CONTEMPORARY EPISTEMOLOGY

Edited by
Scott Stapleford and Verena Wagner



Hume and Contemporary Epistemology

This is the first edited collection dedicated to demonstrating Hume's relevance to contemporary debates in epistemology. It features original essays by Hume scholars and epistemologists that address a wide range of important questions, including the following:

- What does a Humean conception of knowledge look like?
- How do Hume's understanding of belief and suspension of judgement bear on current debates about doxastic attitudes?
- Is there a Humean way of uniting reasons in the epistemic and practical domains?
- What is the proper role of reason at the foundations of ethics and epistemology from a Humean point of view?
- What contribution might an examination of Humean scepticism make to understanding of current sceptical hypotheses?
- Is Hume a hinge epistemologist?
- Does naturalized epistemology trace back to Hume?
- Does Hume have an ethics of belief?
- What can Hume contribute to virtue and vice epistemology?

Some chapters try to bring historically accurate interpretations of Hume's ideas into contact with current issues, while others will take ideas merely suggested by Hume and demonstrate their philosophical usefulness. Together, they demonstrate Hume's enduring relevance for debates about knowledge, belief, inquiry and suspension, reasons, modal knowledge, scepticism, hinge epistemology, naturalized epistemology, the ethics of belief and moral epistemology, virtue and vice epistemology, and the epistemology of testimony.

Hume and Contemporary Epistemology will be of interest to scholars and advanced students working on Hume, epistemology, and the history of philosophy.

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Edited by Scott Stapleford and Verena Wagner

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Introductory Note

Scott Stapleford and Verena Wagner

Hume is a 'top five' philosopher according to informal surveys,[1] and one suspects that he'd rank even higher if voting were restricted to professional analytic philosophers. And unlike his German counterpart, Leibniz, who is primarily a metaphysician (if not a formal logician), Hume is essentially an epistemologist. A second contrast to Leibniz is that many of Hume's ideas are directly relevant to issues of current interest—minimal updating is required. The connections between Hume and contemporary epistemology have certainly been examined by others, but no one has yet assembled a 'mixed' team of epistemologists and Hume specialists and asked them to comment on these connections. For several years, we've expected some enterprising Hume enthusiast to produce such an edited collection. The expectation has not been met. Tired of lying around waiting, we decided to do it ourselves (though neither of us really works on Hume). The volume in your hands is the result. Whatever value it has is due to our talented contributors. In rounding up this impressive company, we tried to balance expertise in Hume against knowledge of contemporary philosophy. That the desired balance was achieved should be evident in each of the chapters, all of which are recommended. A thumbnail sketch of the contents will serve as a menu for the selective reader.

Though we've said that Hume is essentially an epistemologist, Stephen Hetherington argues in Chapter 1 that no explicit theory of knowledge is articulated in Hume's writings. Still, a useful conception of knowledge is at least suggested by various comments Hume makes on other matters. Hetherington presents a Hume-inspired conception of knowledge that comports with his own practicalist theory of knowing. In Chapter 2, Stefanie Rocknak shows that due consideration of certain claims Hume makes in the *Treatise* forces us to abandon the clean distinction between demonstrative knowledge and probability that one normally associates with Hume in favour of an epistemology recognizing nothing stronger than the probable: Even intuitive and demonstrative claims can be imagined as otherwise. Rocknak suggests that this eliding of the familiar Humean

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distinction anticipates Quine's famous attack on the analytic/synthetic distinction.

The doxastic phenomenon of suspension of judgement and the so-called "zetetic turn" are topics of keen interest in epistemology these days. Like most thinkers of his time, Hume did not deal directly with suspension or inquiry as mental states or activities, and yet both are central to many of his investigations. In Chapter 3, Verena Wagner and Scott Stapleford show that Hume's understanding of Pyrrhonian scepticism is instructive as to how different contemporary concepts of doxastic neutrality fit into his psychologically informed epistemology.

Paul Boghossian has argued that active reasoning (the kind of reasoning we *do*) is of greater philosophical importance than passive reasoning (the kind of reasoning that *happens* to us). Jonathan Cottrell extracts an argument from Hume in Chapter 4 that accords epistemic priority to passive reasoning and then shows that Hume has the resources to answer Boghossian's argument for the opposite conclusion. Hume's much-discussed anti-rationalist outlook is standardly associated with his opposition to the early modern rationalist view that we can know things about the world using the faculty of reason alone (paradigmatically represented in the works of Descartes, Spinoza and Leibniz). Karl Schafer argues in Chapter 5 that the most radical and philosophically interesting aspects of Hume's anti-rationalist orientation don't concern his characteristic rejection of the rationalist pretension to discern the fundamental nature of reality using intellect alone. They relate more to normative, meta-normative, and meta-philosophical claims about the proper role of reason at the foundations of ethics and epistemology.

A common perspective in contemporary work on reasons and reasoning is that there is substantial unity across the practical and epistemic domains which allows for useful comparisons. Hume's well-known views put him at odds with this perspective. On the practical side, it is passions that fire the engines while beliefs, reason and reasons are comparatively inert. On the theoretical side, beliefs are to be proportioned to the evidence, and thus, evidential reasons appear to play an epistemic rather than a practical role in our mental economy. All of this notwithstanding, Eva Schmidt seeks a unified Humean account of normativity that straddles the practical and epistemic domains. She spells out the Humean account in terms of three 'unity theses' in Chapter 6.

Turning from reasons to scepticism in Chapter 7, Kevin Meeker draws attention to some unexpected structural similarities between Hume's thinking about miracles and contemporary sceptical hypotheses—primarily the Simulation Hypothesis. To take one intriguing example, glitches in the laws that govern simulated realities fit Hume's definition of a 'miracle' neatly. Careful consideration of this and related matters leads Meeker to

question whether Hume really has a proof against miracles, as is commonly supposed. Yuval Avnur takes a different approach to scepticism in Chapter 8, arguing that Humean sceptical arguments pose a greater epistemological challenge than Cartesian sceptical arguments. Cartesian sceptical arguments present radical sceptical alternatives and purport to establish that we're unable to rule them out. Popular solutions to Cartesian sceptical alternatives are mere cosmetic fixes, according to Avnur, which do nothing to address a deeper sceptical argument inspired by Hume.

In Chapter 9, Santiago Echeverri notes that Hume's sceptical doubts regarding induction generalize to other domains (such as belief in other minds, the external world and the past). Echeverri begins by reconstructing the generalized Humean sceptical outlook in a novel way. He argues that the classical interpretation of Hume's naturalist response to the sceptical doubts is unsuccessful. A non-classical reading of Hume's positive views on induction might provide a better response to the generalized sceptical position. In dispensing with the classical interpretation of Hume's naturalistic response, Echeverri also offers a detailed analysis of Crispin Wright's entitlement theory, which he likens to the classical strategy. Entitlement theory makes use of hinges in something like Wittgenstein's sense. So in rejecting entitlement theory as hopeless, Echeverri thereby rejects the 'hinge' strategy for answering Hume's sceptical challenge. Pursuing the theme of hinges further, Duncan Pritchard identifies several important disanalogies in Chapter 10 between hinge commitments and the natural commitments that Hume regards as impervious to sceptical attack. Pritchard's analysis makes several important differences between the anti-sceptical lines of Hume and Wittgenstein clear (and shows how Strawson's famous reading of Hume muddles the issues and hides the distinctions).

W.V.O. Quine's impact on 20th-century epistemology rivals that of Wittgenstein. Angela Coventry makes the case in Chapter 11 that not only Quine's naturalized epistemology but also the naturalized feminist epistemology of Elizabeth Anderson have their roots in Hume's empirical science of the mind. Juxtaposing these recent naturalized epistemologies with Hume's empiricist epistemology leads to a discussion of normativity in the natural and a brief consideration of scepticism.

Early modern thinkers generally took conceivability to be a window into metaphysical possibility: What we can conceive of clearly and distinctly without contradiction is possible; what we cannot conceive of clearly and distinctly without contradiction is impossible. This is an *epistemic* notion of conceivability, and it is normally attributed to Hume. Miren Boehm rejects this reading of Hume in Chapter 12, giving his 'conceivability principle' a very contemporary-sounding twist: Conceivability is the *standard* of metaphysical possibility rather than a source of modal knowledge.

In the realm of moral theory, Hume is often held up as a prime example of a virtue theorist in contrast to Kant, the deontologist. Hsueh Qu takes the reader by surprise in Chapter 13 by identifying a deontological strain running through Hume's epistemology. Those familiar with the literature on the ethics of belief will immediately see a problem: Hume is a doxastic involuntarist. If doxastic attitudes are not within our immediate voluntary control, then how can we be required to do anything with respect to belief? Qu argues that Hume gets round this problem by rejecting the ought-implies-can principle.

Epistemologists working on epistemic virtues fall into two main camps—the reliabilists and the responsibilists. They disagree both about the nature of epistemic virtue and, in some cases, about which particular traits or faculties count as epistemic virtues. Sarah Wright develops a unified account of epistemic virtue in Chapter 14 based on Hume's distinction between the natural and artificial virtues. Mark Collier zooms in on the particular epistemic vice of prejudice in Chapter 15 and shows how Hume holds us culpable for our biases regardless of our inability to control them or the character traits from which they flow. Hume is thus to blame for his own racial prejudices, according to Collier, even though current vice epistemologists want to absolve us of responsibility for vices beyond our control.

Reductionist accounts of testimony hold that we are justified in accepting a person's testimony because we have perceptual, memorial and inductive evidence that they generally tell the truth and get things right. Hume's essay on miracles is normally taken to be evidence of his reductionism. In the final chapter of the volume, Dan O'Brien argues that Hume's treatment of testimony regarding miracles should not be seen as articulating a Humean epistemology of testimony applicable across all contexts. A broader look at Hume's comments on testimony actually suggests an anti-reductionist view, according to which testimony is a fundamental source of knowledge not reducible to perception, inductive inference, or memory.

Note

1 See Brian Leiter's polls: https://leiterreports.typepad.com/blog/2017/04/the-most-important-western-philosophers-of-all-time.html and https://leiterreports.typepad.com/blog/2009/05/the-20-most-important-philosophers-of-all-time.html

Part I
Knowledge

1 A Humean-Practicalist Conception of Knowing

Stephen Hetherington

1.1 Introduction

What conception of knowing is explicitly proposed in Hume's writing? Perhaps none, in spite of his having been a pivotal practitioner of one of *the* most influential epistemological methodologies – empiricism. As to what current epistemologists would call 'a theory of knowledge', we search in vain among his works: we find at most a partial and implicit account; even then, we encounter mainly his applying it, not his elaborating its details as an account of the nature of knowledge *per se*. Platonic accounts were manifestly not Hume's preferred quarry. What might he have made of a request for such an account of knowledge's nature? He might have dismissed the request as too abstract, too metaphysical.

Nonetheless, *was* a useful conception of knowledge lurking within his discussions? Maybe so. This chapter will show how we might extract one from various of Hume's comments *not* explicitly on knowing. The result is a Hume-inspired, even if not Hume-endorsed, conception. We will see how easily he *might* have derived a potentially useful conception of knowledge by adapting some of his main ideas on other matters. It would have been a conception at home even within those anti-metaphysical strictures of his notably demanding empiricism.

1.2 What Did Hume Say about Knowing's Nature?

Hume did use the term 'knowledge', seemingly consistently, seemingly exemplifying a simple pattern. We would call those uses *infallibilist*. To appreciate this, we need to look no further than THN 1.3.1 – 'Of Knowledge'. Almost immediately, knowledge is paired with 'certainty' (THN 1.3.1.2). Whereupon Hume invites us to reflect on what can be 'the objects of' these terms. What are those objects? Hume answers in general terms: among 'kinds of philosophical relation', 'there remain only four,

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which depending solely upon ideas, can be the objects of knowledge and certainty'.[1]

That conveys something of the *extension* of the word 'knowledge', as penned by Hume. Generally, however, we expect epistemologists also to describe an *intension* when seeking to elucidate knowledge's nature. Consider Noonan's (1999) *Hume on Knowledge*. Given its title, we might anticipate a discussion of Hume's discussions of knowledge, articulating his conception of knowing – what knowledge as such *is*. But this is not what happens with Hume, and so – aptly – it is not what appears in Noonan's book.

That philosophical distance between Hume and us – our *expectations* of what we can uncover in writing possessing such epistemological heft – might be lengthened also if we wish to meet a relevant intension attached to a *concept*, say, not merely a word. However, Hume's focus was not on (what we generally call) concepts. Famously, instead, he had substantial views about *ideas*. And can we take a step towards a conception of knowing by revisiting his concerns about the care needed in claiming to be using ideas? Specifically, can we apply his central methodological thesis, about ideas and impressions, to the idea of knowing, potentially learning something Humean about knowing's nature?

1.3 Ideas and Impressions

Hume urged, for any prospective *idea*, the need for *impressions* from which the idea has, or could have, arisen. Courtesy of which impressions might an idea of *knowing* emerge? We use the word 'knowledge'; do we have a genuine idea of knowing? Do we have a shared idea of it, too? This depends, for a start, on what such an idea's content could be, given what forms those impressions might take. I will focus on that specific dependence.

What Hume says about ideas/impressions dependence in general could hardly be more familiar (EHU 2.9).

> All ideas, especially abstract ones, are naturally faint and obscure … They are apt to be confounded with other resembling ideas; and when we have often employed any term, though without a distinct meaning, we are apt to imagine it has a determinate idea annexed to it. … When we entertain, therefore, any suspicion that a philosophical term is employed without any meaning or idea (as is but too frequent), we need but inquire, *from what impression is that supposed idea derived*? And if it be impossible to assign any, this will serve to confirm our suspicion. By bringing ideas into so clear a light we may reasonably hope to remove all dispute … concerning their nature and reality.

Nothing is more Humean than that warning – other than some uses that he makes of it (as to which, more soon). Let us meet a further possible use of it. Hume does not apply his cautionary moral to talk of *knowing*. What happens when *we* do so? Is any putative idea of knowing too 'faint and obscure'?[2] If not, from which 'impressions' – at least what kinds of impressions – is it 'derived'? Should the answer to the latter question constrain the *content* that we claim to find in any idea of knowing? Might it limit how Hume should have used the word 'knowledge'?

For instance, I am wondering whether an *aptly* Humean conception of knowing must be weaker than the infallibilism (see Section 1.2) presumed by Hume when using that word. Think of his 'Sceptical doubts concerning the operations of the understanding' (EHU 4), leading to the picture of our relying, more mutedly, on '*custom* or *habit*' (EHU 5.1.5). Think of his scrutiny 'Of the idea of necessary connexion' (EHU 7), leading to this also-more-muted picture (EHU 7.2.29).

> Similar objects are always conjoined with similar. Of this we have experience. Suitably to this experience, therefore, we may define a cause to be *an object, followed by another, and where all the objects similar to the first are followed by objects similar to the second*.

Might a similarly muted picture emerge from a similarly Humean examination of our idea of knowing? Could a less metaphysically ambitious conception of knowing emerge, as occurred with Hume's own conception of causation?

1.4 Epistemic Impressions

I begin with this question: with which impressions should we build towards an idea of knowing? For argument's sake, I assume that some impressions can be *epistemic* in content. These would be our most immediate epistemic data, en route to an epistemic interpretation involving epistemic ideas – such as, potentially, an idea of knowing.

Would some epistemic impressions be *sensory*? If I ask you what knowing *looks* like, or *sounds* like, for instance, how should you reply? With puzzlement, since there is *no* way that knowing looks or sounds. And *where* is it? Nowhere. There is no sensory impression (at least directly) of knowing. But might some sensory epistemic impressions guide us *towards* an idea of knowing? Knowing is nothing if not epistemic; so, the quality of being epistemic must enter this dependence-story somewhere; so, on a Humean picture, we should ask whether – and, if so, how – it enters with apposite impressions.

I will be somewhat speculative. My initial hypothesis is that epistemic impressions would enter in concert with what I have elsewhere called an *epistemic diaspora* (2011a, 35). I envisaged, as associated with any instance of knowing that *p* (for a specific *p*), a range of possible ways of *expressing* or *manifesting* or *exemplifying* the knowledge. Imagine a range like this, with one or more (or none) of these occurring at a time, associated with knowing that *p*:

> believing accurately that *p*, remembering accurately that *p*, asserting accurately that *p*, answering accurately in *p*-related ways, representing accurately that *p*, sensing accurately that *p*, explaining accurately in *p*-related ways, hypothesising accurately in *p*-related ways, reasoning accurately in *p*-related ways, acting accurately in *p*-related ways, and so on.

Such actions might be the most likely (however likely that is) contenders to be objects or contents of epistemic impressions. Some of those impressions would be of something external to one's mind, such as of another person's actions. Others would be of something internal, such as one's own mental events. If impressions such as *these* are not epistemic in content, what is? How – we may imagine Hume asking – *can* we form epistemic ideas, if not by building on impressions like these?

They would be impressions of *epistemic actions* (members of an associated epistemic diaspora). Today I hear you answering accurately that *p*. Tomorrow I sense accurately that *p*. Do you thereby know that *p*? Do I thereby know that *p*? Maybe this is not established by those impressions alone. But are they at least *categorially* apt impressions from which to derive at least an *idea* of knowing that *p*?[3]

1.5 An Idea of Knowing

I will suppose so, in an investigative spirit, while seeking a possible Humean conception of knowing. This question then arises: what will an idea of knowing be *like*, in arising from such epistemic impressions? More fully, how should we conceive of knowing's nature, when relying on impressions of one or more instances of one or more of those kinds of epistemic action?

We may draw upon three of Hume's more celebrated discussions, while aiming to stay within the boundaries drawn by his discussion more generally of '*abstract* or *general* ideas' (THN 1.1.7.1) – what we call concepts (Garrett 2015, 52).[4] We may look to his critical analysis (EHU 7) of the idea of a *necessary connection*. We may adapt his worry (THN 1.4.6) about the idea of an *inner personal substance*. We may apply (what philosophers call) his discussion of *inductive scepticism* – both the worry (EHU 4) and

the 'solution' (EHU 5), directed at 'the operations of the understanding'. (All of this will occupy the next few sections.)

Imagine being confronted by one or more epistemic actions from an epistemic diaspora for a particular *p*. In a standard manner (maybe perceptual, maybe introspective), you form impressions of those epistemic actions. Do you *infer* that the person knows that *p*? Do you form at least an *idea* of her knowing that *p*?

Presumably you have no impression directly of the knowing. At most, you have a conjunction of impressions, each directed at an epistemic action. Maybe you form and retain ideas of the actions, derived from the impressions (EHU 2.3). You might conjoin those ideas (EHU 2.4). And then what? How do you move from this – these impressions and ideas of those actions – to an idea of *knowing*?

I called the actions 'epistemic'. That was already an interpretive move; what, if anything, justifies it by Humean lights? More neutrally, they are *actions* – perhaps *sans* any epistemic quality. Maybe *retrospectively*, they could be regarded – interpreted – as epistemic, *after* we have formed an idea of knowing, having grounded it in these impressions. Yet how would we do this? *Can* we do it?

Our best Humean chance, I suggest, is to propose (in the spirit of EHU 2.5) that this conjunction, or this sort of conjunction, *is* all of the content that you are entitled to include in your idea of knowledge's being present. This idea of knowing is thus complex, and those actions are thereby deemed to be epistemic.

That also sounds epistemically deflationary. Seemingly, it sets aside the everyday assumption that those actions *reflect* the presence of knowledge. Is this welcome? Or should we say that there is knowing 'behind' those actions, with the knowledge's independent existence being the best *explanation* of why those actions are occurring, and hence of how they are epistemic?

I doubt that we should, *qua* potential Humeans, embrace that view. It is easily read as treating an instance of knowing like a kind of inner personal substance. The knowing would underlie the knowing actions – *making* them knowing actions – much as an inner personal substance would underlie those and other actions – *making* them personal actions. And once we accept this commonality, we might apply Hume's sceptical discussion of the supposed idea of an inner personal substance, reaching for analogous doubts about the supposed idea of an inner instance of knowing.

I am not saying that this Humean thinking admits of no counter-questions; for the moment, however, I do not raise any. My point is that already we have this reason why a Humean may be wary of the view that knowing, never directly an object of impressions, must be 'standing separately behind' those actions (which I have optimistically termed 'epistemic

actions' or even 'knowing actions') of which we *can* have impressions. Might these impressions constrict, even exhaust, any idea of knowing that we could rightly form?

1.6 An Epistemic Uniformity Thesis

Our Humean question about the potential content of a properly grounded idea of *knowing* instantiates a larger question, about the idea of an *epistemic fact*. Asking this returns us to an issue that, earlier, I set aside for argument's sake. How can we ever know, in a way that passes epistemic tests posed by Hume, that an impression of an action is of something epistemic? Hence, how can we ever know that an *idea* formed from such an impression is epistemic – let alone that it is accurate in portraying the action as epistemic, even as reporting its agent's *knowing*? How would Hume regard our capacity to know such a fact? What would *he* expect of us, if we are to know the presence of knowledge, in particular?

We noted (in Section 1.2) his view that knowledge is a kind of certainty. So, could we know about knowledge (in a way that would satisfy Hume) by focusing on *relations of ideas*? I doubt it. Our present question concerns how to use impressions of various actions to reach an idea of knowing. Those impressions are of specific actions on specific occasions. Hence, we are asking about knowledge's presence on an occasion – a *contingent* state of affairs. How is *it* to be known? Not by attending to 'relations of ideas'. How would Hume advise us even to interpret that question, let alone to satisfy its epistemic challenge?

Here we reach for another element within his larger picture. I expect that he would have us look no further than 'the relation of *cause* and *effect*' (EHU 4.1.4), since we are discussing a 'matter of fact', albeit an epistemic one. In which event, we must adapt, to this case, Hume's 'sceptical doubts concerning the operations of the understanding' (EHU 4). I will rely on a simple standard reading of his argument.[5]

EHU 4.1 pointed to the need for our 'reasonings concerning matter of fact' to be *a posteriori*, being 'founded on the relation of cause and effect' (EHU 4.1.4). EHU 4.2 argued that such reasonings presume a *uniformity* thesis. In our present case, this will be an *epistemic* uniformity thesis, maybe motivated along the following lines.

Recall the heart of EHU 4.2's argument (4.2.21).

> When a man says, *I have found, in all past instances, such sensible qualities conjoined with such secret powers*: And when he says, *Similar sensible qualities will always be conjoined with similar secret powers*; he is not guilty of a tautology … You say that the one proposition is an inference from the other. But you must confess that the

> inference is not intuitive; neither is it demonstrative. Of what nature is it, then? To say that it is experimental, is begging the question. For all inferences from experience suppose, as their foundation, that the future will resemble the past, and that similar powers will be conjoined with similar sensible qualities. If there be any suspicion that the course of nature may change, and that the past may be no rule for the future, all experience becomes useless, and can give rise to no inference or conclusion.

We may apply that reasoning to the example of an *epistemic* fact – also contingent. I suppose, for argument's sake, that various past epistemic impressions have reflected some knowledge's presence: we have experienced instances of knowing, insofar as these *can* be experienced.[6] We might even have fashioned a more, or less, extensive *theory* of knowing's nature, based on those experiences. This could be an epistemological equivalent of a 'theory' such as 'Bread has qualities that will underlie its continuing to taste as it has tasted so far, in our experiences of it'. We would be forming an idea, with a predictive component, from those impressions. We would be reacting to our experiences of instances of knowing, much as we have reacted to our experiences of instances of tasting bread. We might, for example, say that, so far, instances of knowing have included a true belief plus good evidence or a truth-conditionally reliable genesis. This would be a complex reading of those past experiences. But, still for argument's sake, I allow even this to stand. For the record, though, note that *if* we cannot use it as a predictive basis for future epistemic experiences, we might need to revisit that concession. For it is epistemologically standard to offer such a reading with an eye *also on* how we expect to describe and interpret future experiences of instances of knowing: we 'meet' instances of knowing; we describe them in general terms; we keep that description in mind while preparing to 'meet' – to experience – future instances of knowing.

Yet *must* future experiences of knowing be similar to past ones? In that sense, must a theory of knowing's nature, even if it has been true for past epistemic impressions, *remain* true?

That question is not about whether people might begin *misperceiving* persisting and unchanging marks of knowing. The question concerns whether there *are* such marks, available to be known. Must future knowing – or at least knowing-yet-to-be-experienced – be like past and present (experienced) knowing in all currently significant respects?

I am assuming, in a Humean guise, that possessing or manifesting knowledge is a (contingent) matter of fact. In which case, its presence on an occasion could be known (on a Humean picture) only by knowing the proximate role of cause and effect – hence by presuming a *uniformity*

thesis, too, within whatever reasoning would be providing the knowledge of knowledge's presence. And this should direct our gaze towards an adapted-Humean uniformity-question – of whether future knowing must be like past or present knowing. In epistemic practice, this amounts to whether future experiences (impressions) of knowing (more generally, of epistemic actions) must be like past or present ones – given how knowing is, or is not, itself unchanging in nature throughout that period. Even if knowing has been (experienced as being) thus-and-so, my Humean question concerns whether we are presuming that this will *remain* true, when we infer future knowing's also being thus-and-so. Are we presuming that knowing's nature is *not about to change*?

That is not a philosophically standard question. Epistemologists generally proceed, more simply, by describing some actual or imagined cases, of knowing or of not knowing – before inferring an account of knowledge's nature. Is that account intended to be timelessly true? Ideally so, although in practice it might be tested against further actual or imagined cases. Even so, the further testing seems never to wonder whether knowing *has* a persisting nature. The aim is to discover this nature, not to consider whether it is actually or potentially changeable. The further testing might reflect a feeling that one has not yet had enough experiences of instances of knowing – but that, given time, one *will* have had them, making one correspondingly more confident as to knowing's unchanging nature.

Again, though, what *if* knowing's nature, as it has apparently been experienced until now, is about to change – so that soon we will have quite different experiences of what it is like? Can we know that however knowing has been experienced until now – what its apparent nature has been – is not how it will be experienced in the future – *because its nature might itself be in flux*?

Yet what does that question mean? What *could* such flux be? *How* might knowing change its nature? For one possible answer, consider *causally fluky worlds* (2011a, 135). Comparing these with *causally stable* ones should lead, I have argued (ibid., Ch. 3), to questioning whether knowledge must include epistemic justification. Now imagine this world's alternating, randomly, between periods of causal stability and ones of causal flux. Would knowing such a world during its stable periods differ in nature from knowing it during the fluky times? Would such *meta*-flux thus give our knowing a shifting nature?

So, my question about whether we know that knowing's nature is not malleable over time is an adaptation of Hume's own question about (what we call) inductive inference. How should a Humean answer the adaptive question?[7] Here is the vital final segment of the Hume-quotation from earlier in this section, adapted to this case.

> To say that [the inference to knowledge's nature not being about to change] is experimental, is begging the question. For all inferences from experience [including epistemic experience] suppose, as their foundation, that the future will resemble the past, and that similar [epistemic actions in the future] will be conjoined with similar sensible qualities [like those experienced in the past]. If there be any suspicion that the course of nature may change, and that the past may be no rule for the future, all [epistemic] experience [including of knowing] becomes useless, and can give rise to no inference or conclusion [about future epistemic experience, including of knowing].

Such projections, ostensibly from experiences of knowing, to conclusions supposedly about future experiences of knowing, presume knowing's having a correlatively constant nature. The presumption is thus, in effect, that suitable experiences can reveal knowing's full nature now, with future experiences of knowing being similar in all associated respects: the expectation is that however knowing *has* been, in its basic nature, is how it will *continue* being. Given the adapted-Humean sceptical reasoning, though, how could we improve upon *merely* presuming that uniformity in knowing's nature? Can we know this uniformity – without crediting ourselves with already knowing that nature?

I have been framing this issue as asking about *knowing* knowing's nature. The issue can be framed more generally. If we are to *learn at all* about knowing's nature, by projecting from epistemic experiences (including ones supposedly of knowing), we must presume that knowing's nature is not about to change – hence that it at least *has* a nature, enough of whose details have already been displayed to us in our epistemic experiences.

So, the challenge posed by the adapted-Humean sceptical reasoning is this. Perhaps we need to revisit those past epistemic experiences, asking how they should have been interpreted even then, when they arose. Were we aptly describing them *as* epistemic in the first place, due to their expressing or manifesting knowing? How can we accurately describe them even in that general way *unless* we have 'looked ahead' in the inferential-projective way now being questioned by our adaptation of Hume's sceptical thinking? How can we accurately describe those experiences even in that general way *unless* we have already established that there is a persisting and constant nature *at all* 'stretching out' ahead of us, *available* to be experienced not only now but also in the future?

1.7 Knowing as Constant Conjunction

Hume did not clearly feel trapped by his sceptical doubts. His 'sceptical solution' (EHU 5) seemed to reassure him. Should we be similarly

optimistic? I will continue in a sympathetically Humean vein. Might we adapt his 'solution' to our adapted-Humean case? For example, is it possible that knowing's nature *is* changeable? How could that be so?

We need only revisit Section 1.3's highlighting of Hume's portrayal of causation as conjunction. Section 1.6 asked whether knowing could *change* at least some (observable) aspects of its nature over time. Can we accommodate that adapted-Humean question about knowing by linking it with a similarly-adapted-Humean view of causation? Can we allow knowing to be *constituted* in a 'looser' way – much as Hume did for causation (EHU 7)? We can expand that question along the following lines.

How are knowing's supposedly distinguishing marks – such as truth, belief, and epistemic justification – 'held together', jointly constituting knowledge's presence? Could there be something 'looser' in how this occurs – enough so to allow the perpetual possibility of knowing as such being about to *change* its nature? There could be, for a start, if knowing is a matter of a constant *conjoining* of its marks, not a *connective binding* of each with the others.

Let me expand, albeit schematically, upon that adapted-Humean distinction.

> *Connections*. Knowing = Some components, say, being strongly linked – constitutively *connected* – to each other (on 'analyses' or 'explications' of knowing).
>
> *Conjunctions*. Knowing = Some components, say, being conjoined with – constitutively *accompanying* – each other (on 'analyses' or 'explications' of knowing).

Hume's account (EHU 7) of causation as constant conjunction, not as connection, reflected there being no impressions directly of causation's occurring. At best, one has impressions of specific events, which one may interpret – implicitly projecting forwards in time, predicting the continuation of a pattern of conjunction – as causal events. One thereby fashions an *idea* of causation's presence, an idea whose content is of a constant conjunction. And knowing, I suggest, admits of a similar treatment, *mutatis mutandis*. There is no impression directly of knowing's occurring. At best, one has impressions of specific actions, which one may interpret – implicitly projecting forwards in time, predicting the continuation of a pattern of conjunction – as knowing actions. One thereby fashions an *idea* of knowing's presence – an idea, I suggest, whose content is also of a constant conjunction, *mutatis mutandis*.

Hume took himself to be arguing against a tempting alternative – the claim that causation *is* connection.[8] I am offering a Humean story that likewise guides us away from a tempting alternative, one implicitly

accepted by most epistemologists reflecting on knowing's nature. On that usual alternative, knowing is constituted by various aspects (perhaps components, perhaps links to other phenomena) – *and* this is necessarily so. It is unchangingly so, timelessly so. Knowing has this inner metaphysical 'glue' binding its constitutive aspects. Its nature is thus-constituted. And this strict unchangeability allows knowing's nature to be uncovered through a *less*-than-full empirical investigation. As I said in Section 1.6, the routine expectation is that we need only 'meet' some actual or imagined cases, of knowing or perhaps of not knowing, if we are to learn *fully what knowing is*. But Section 1.6 also argued, in a Humean spirit, against that expectation's being unquestionably warranted.

This does not leave us with no potential conception of knowing, though, just as Hume did not regard his doubts about having impressions of causal connections as depriving him of a conception – an idea – of causation. We may remain similarly Humean, adopting a more 'muted' conception of knowing – as a *conjunction* of components or links, not a *connecting* of them.

The availability of this conception is somewhat ironic, given Hume's pairing of knowledge with *certainty*, in a single elegant breath (Section 1.2). The irony is that, if knowing is metaphysically a conjoining but not a connecting of aspects, then, even when all-but-one of these are present, this does not ensure that the final one is. (And if it is absent, so is knowing.) On this conception, knowing is 'held together' more loosely than we might have thought. Perhaps, therefore, Hume should have adopted a *fallibilism* about knowledge's nature. If we do not know that knowing's nature is not about to change, maybe we should welcome a conception of knowing on which its aspects – its constituents or members of its distinguishing network[9] – are only 'held together' in a loose and separate way, a contingently conjoined way. In this sense, being knowledge is a metaphysically *accidental* grouping of characteristics and circumstances. This sense of 'accidental' contrasts with the equally metaphysical 'essential'. Hence, perhaps being knowledge is not essential even *to* whatever is knowledge.[10] In Humean terms, the components or links that are, on a given occasion, marking off an instance of knowing (distinguishing knowing from non-knowing) are not *connected* to each other; rather, they are conjoined. Even *within* an instance of knowing, this is so – just as, within an instance of causation, the pertinent constituents are not connected, according to Hume (EHU 7).

1.8 Knowing-Episodes

We may add resonance to Section 1.7's programmatic picture – of knowing as always 'held together' only accidentally – with an idea from some

classical Indian epistemology. Adding the idea of a *pramā* to what has been proposed as a possible Humean theory of knowledge might enrich that theory.

We would accord the idea of a *pramā* the metaphysically central role typically assumed by contemporary Western epistemologists to be played by *states* of knowledge. That role is a metaphysical given, for many: knowing *is* having, or being in, a state of knowing. Knowledge *is* a state. In knowing much, one is in many such states. No matter how we slice and count them, they remain states. Yet that is not the only metaphysical option available to epistemologists. A *pramā* is a knowledge-*episode*, and (as I now explain) a Humean epistemology might profit from talking first and foremost about this, instead of knowledge-states. From Matilal (1986, 22): 'A *pramāṇa* is the *means* leading to a knowledge-episode (*pramā*) as its end'. From Stoltz (2021, 11):

> The most fundamental concept in all of Indian epistemology, both for Buddhists and non-Buddhists, is the concept of *pramāṇa*. … Stated most straightforwardly, a *pramāṇa* is a *means* or *instrument* by which a subject attains knowledge. More technically, a *pramāṇa* is held to be the instrument via which a cognitive agent achieves *pramā* – where *pramā* is an episode of knowledge.

My Humean focus is less on the *pramāṇa* than on the *pramā*. Epistemologists, when describing knowledge as a state, generally do not distinguish metaphysically between knowledge and knowing.[11] The difference for them remains linguistic; metaphysically, they presume, knowing *is just* one's having knowledge, which *is just* one's being in a knowledge-state. Knowing is thus not treated as inherently *active*, in any respect. Yes, one might have reached the knowing-state via epistemic actions. Equally, however, one might not have done so, since this is *not inherent to being in* the resulting state. Once one knows that *p*, nothing *inherently active* – specifically, no inherently active knowing – is thereby occurring. Even if one knows that *p*, and continues knowing that *p*, one is merely *persisting* in that same state, of knowing that *p*.

My discontent with that usual package of locutions is not a denial of there being knowledge-states. My point is that there are also knowledge-episodes, *inherently* tied to epistemic activity. At least as potential endings for epistemic actions, they come into existence *as* tied to activity, resulting *from* activity. A knowledge-state lacks that inherent tie to action. If a person could be created in an instant, might she arrive complete with knowledge-states? What *is* clear is that she would lack knowledge-episodes.[12]

We may blend that distinction with Hume's ideas/impressions distinction. I offer this hypothesis: an *idea* of a knowledge-*state* is ultimately

available, if at all, only via *impressions* of knowing-*episodes*. Those knowing-episodes, I also hypothesise, amount to impressions of knowing *actions* (Section 1.5). Incorporating talk of knowing-episodes and knowing actions into our accompanying metaphysics in that way renders our epistemology *more* Humean. If we are to be deriving an idea of knowing from impressions of knowing (which, I am suggesting, amount to impressions of knowing-episodes, thereby knowing actions), we do well not to import *added content* into that idea, beyond what we find in those impressions. So it seems sage not to expect, within content placed before one's mind in an epistemic impression, anything beyond what would thereby be an episode occurring before one, rather than a state that at best would be 'behind' the episode. Hence, the needed epistemic impressions would be *of* knowing-episodes, not knowing-states.[13]

1.9 Knowing-Practicalism

More strictly, we would be deriving an idea of knowledge from impressions not of knowing-episodes but of observable (either external or internal) manifestations of those knowing-episodes. Collectively, those manifestations were what (Section 1.4) I termed an epistemic diaspora. You hear someone answering a question accurately. You introspect yourself doing likewise. You see someone moving, apparently with intent, in a way that fits with a request. You introspect yourself forming such an intention; you feel inner stirrings of congruent action. And so on.

With which interpretive overlay, we could be moving – in a Humean spirit – towards what I have long called a knowledge-*practicalism*. That name derives from (i) the common labelling of knowledge-how as 'practical knowledge' – in the sense of knowing how *to do* X (regardless of whether X is useful) – allied with (ii) my having argued for all knowledge-that's *being* knowledge-how. I do not repeat those arguments here;[14] I offer a brief sense of this conception.

We took a step towards it with the idea of an epistemic diaspora. Those epistemic actions are possible manifestations or exemplifications of kinds of knowledge-how bearing upon *p* – each of which is a species of some more generic knowledge-how, also bearing upon *p*. For instance, in knowing that *p*, one might know how to answer questions correctly with '*p*', and/or know how to form 'inner' *p*-representations in suitable settings,[15] and/or know how to gather and/or use *p*-related evidence, etc.

The next step is the main one. When I said 'in knowing that *p*' just now, I did not mean 'by – that is, as a result of – knowing that *p*'. My point is not merely that knowing is a *causal* means by which one can perform related actions. Rather, I am (metaphysically) *identifying* knowing as a means by

which one can perform such actions. The relevant use of 'in' is constitutive and intrinsic, not causal or extrinsic. Knowing *is* power – literally.

Contrast that metaphysical picture with standard conceptions of knowledge-that. They portray knowledge as, for example, a belief – with apt epistemic properties, such as its having been formed in a sufficiently evidence-responsive way. Thus, knowledge is conceived of in a *substance-attribute* way: the belief amounts to a substance with attributes. But that picture is not metaphysically obligatory. Consider my practicalist alternative – which is also a more broadly *Humean* picture. How is that so? The basic reason is that, on practicalism, *knowledge is person-like-in-a-Humean-way*. It is more a *bundle* (of one or more kinds of knowledge-how, bearing congruently upon the particular *p*) than a substance-with-attributes. And conceiving of individuals *at all* as bundles is a venerable alternative to substance-attribute approaches. It is also famously Humean, courtesy of his reflections on personal identity. And what we will now see is how his conception of persons may be adapted, *mutatis mutandis*, to provide a conception of knowledge-identity, in effect. In explaining how this is so, I will draw on one of my earlier defences (Hetherington 2017) of knowledge-practicalism.

I began thus (ibid., Sec. 4):

> [Hume] proposed a reconception of the fundamental *nature* of personal identity. What *is* a person? Hume's answer was that each of us is a *republic* or *commonwealth* of experiences [THN 1.4.6.19], a *bundle* of ideas and impressions [THN 1.4.6.3]. What persists as a person's persisting *is* the bundle as such – not necessarily its particular members, and not a further inner substance underlying and binding together those phenomena. Might an analogous picture illuminate the relationship between a person's persisting *knowledge*, such as her knowing that 58 + 68 = 126, and her related cognitive actions (such as calculating, accepting, and asserting)?

Here is what I said, soon afterwards, about knowing (ibid.):

> Your calculating, your accepting, your asserting: these are actions expressing or manifesting your knowing that 58 + 68 = 126. Equally, they are ways of expressing some or all of whatever skills are jointly constituting a *commonwealth* or *bundle* of your associated abilities. That commonwealth or bundle may then be regarded as some complex knowledge-how: you have some specific knowledge insofar as you have some pertinent abilities, each of which is such that an action expressing or manifesting it is *thereby* an expression or manifestation of knowing.

Hence, we have this explanatory hypothesis:

> Actions that seem to reflect knowledge-that are expressions of knowledge-how; and to note this is to explain all that would be explained in positing the knowledge-that. Hence, if we insist on knowledge-that's being present, we are free to regard the knowledge-that *as* the knowledge-how. In short, knowledge-that is knowledge-how and nothing else.

Voila: we have knowledge-practicalism – à la Hume.[16]

Notes

1 Garrett (2015, 42) says, 'In practice, [Hume] does not always restrict himself to this usage; throughout his writings, he often uses "know" and "knowledge" in a looser and more colloquial way'. But this, although correct, might be more a pity than precedent, when we wonder what we can learn from wider aspects of Hume's system – suitably adapted – about knowing's nature.

2 Speaking of 'faint and obscure', many epistemologists feel drawn towards Williamson (2000)'s idea of *knowledge-first* epistemology. He motivates this initially by turning away from seeking any *conceptual analysis* of knowledge. We are encouraged to conceive of knowledge – directly, not 'analysing' it – as 'the most general factive mental state' (ibid., 33). Is that Hume-clear? Not to me. Even if we eschew 'conceptual analysis', from which impressions might we derive Williamson's favoured idea? Let the work begin; and see Hetherington (2022a, Sec. 6.3) for reservations about Williamson's thinking here.

3 Clark and Chalmers (1998, 8) also use the term 'epistemic action': '*Epistemic actions* alter the world so as to aid and augment cognitive processes such as recognition and search' (and are distinct from '*pragmatic* actions'). I would add to that description the phrase 'have the potential to'. The world might be altered in such ways; it might not. Elsewhere (2013, 24), I talk of 'knowing actions' – 'actions whose apparent point is to exemplify or manifest knowledge-that': 'Knowing actions are clearly – we would say, pre-theoretically – intended to *convey* knowledge'. My focus is thus on the nature, not the effects, of these actions. I avoid pre-judging this chapter's attempt to 'find' knowledge and knowing among one's actions.

4 The main boundary is the need to reconcile the particularity of any such idea – its content's including specific details – with its power to be applied more widely, beyond what appears in its content. For more discussion, see Garrett (2015, 52–60). So far (from Section 1.5) on my Hume-inspired account, the needed particularity enters with epistemic impressions, and the equally needed generality will reflect an associated epistemic diaspora.

5 Elsewhere (2008b), I offer an alternative reading, which I do not use right now. Insofar as this discussion might wend its way to a non-standard conclusion, I prefer it to remain standard for as long as possible along that path.

6 And insofar as they can be interpreted and described in those terms – itself a significant challenge. It is why I asked (in Section 1.5) about our epistemic right to regard those initial epistemic impressions as being of epistemic actions at all. This related challenge is what, I believe, was posed by Goodman's puzzle of 'grue' (1983, Ch. III). For one response to him, see Hetherington (2001b).
7 But *why* should a Humean answer the adapted question? Hume was the very model of a modern major-general of *naturalised* epistemology: epistemic phenomena, for him, function congruently within a natural world. This, I take it, allows us to ask Humeans to say more about knowing *as* something that is potentially mutable and changeable in natural ways. I see Hume as akin, in this general epistemological spirit, to Quine (1969) and Kornblith (2002), perhaps most notably.
8 He did not do so in a historical vacuum, of course. See Buckle (2001, Sec. VII) for detailed discussion, especially of Hume's 'profound debt' here to 'Malebranche's arguments' (ibid., 191, 192). Buckle ends his account of Hume's argument in terms that are congenial to my Humean picture: 'The sceptical doubt expressed in [EHU 7.1] is not that there are no powers in nature, but that we do not directly perceive them' (2001, 200). In a similar spirit, I am suggesting, knowledge is a power, even if not one that 'we … directly perceive'.
9 My word 'aspects' here encompasses both components and links. I mean to cover both (i) a conception of knowing on which we 'analyse' it, noting its *components*, and (ii) something more like Williamson's (2000) knowledge-first conception, on which we note the knowing's *links*, maybe locating knowing within a wider *network* of potential uses and conceptual interrelations.
10 This description coheres well with my conceiving (1999; 2001a, Sec. 2.5; 2016, Sec. 7.2.2) of *fallible* knowledge as a species of what I call *failable* knowledge.
11 For more on this distinction, see Hetherington (2011b).
12 For more on action and knowing, see Hetherington (2022b, 2022c).
13 This section is rendered even more apposite by possible (albeit partial) precedents and congruences, for Hume's discussion of induction, especially in some Nyāya epistemology, even more especially with Carvaka-school thinking. On this, see Chakrabarti (2010, 14–16), drawing on 'the great Nyāya philosopher Udayana for an account of the Carvaka position', given that Carvaka's writings are now lost (ibid., 2).
14 See, for example, Hetherington (2008a; 2011a, Ch. 2; 2011b; 2013; 2017; 2018; 2019; 2020a; 2020b; 2023).
15 The idea of some settings being suitable ones in which to manifest or exemplify *p*-related knowledge-how could require us also to countenance the idea of knowing-*to*. I develop this idea elsewhere (Hetherington 2022c).
16 I am grateful to Stephen Buckle and Scott Stapleford for very helpful comments on earlier versions of this chapter.

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2 Why Hume's Notion of Demonstration Must Reduce to Probability

A Prelude to Quine

Stefanie Rocknak

2.1 Introduction

According to Hume, demonstrative reasoning, along with intuition, may produce knowledge (THN 1.3.1.2, THN 1.3.11.2). In the case of demonstrative reason, we move from one idea to another via a reflective "comparing" process, while in the case of intuition, no reflective process is involved; we immediately "intuit" the given relation between the ideas at hand. Regardless of this difference, in places in *The Treatise*, Hume claims that neither demonstrative nor intuitive claims can be imagined as otherwise without creating a contradiction, and so, are certain (THN 1.3.3.3, THN 1.3.6.1, THN 1.3.6.5, THN 1.3.7.3, THN 1.3.9.10, THN 1.3.14.13, and THN Abstract 11, 18).

But why, exactly, can't we imagine a demonstrative or intuited claim as otherwise?[1] Did Hume think that they constitute "deductive inferences?" (Stove 1973), (Millican 1995, 2002), (Mackie 1979), (Beauchamp and Rosenberg 1981)? No. Hume was ultimately forced to conclude in *The Treatise* that all demonstrative and intuited claims *can*, in fact, be imagined as otherwise. As a result, he was forced to conclude that all knowledge claims must, ultimately, reduce to probable claims, or in Hume's *own*, and indisputably clear words: "*all knowledge degenerates into probability*" (THN 1.4.1.1; emphasis added). In this chapter, I show why this is the case. As a further result, I show—in general terms due to length restraints—how this anticipates Quine's well-known attack on the analytic/synthetic distinction (Quine 1953).

To do this, I have divided the chapter into five sections. In Section 2.2 we review Hume's notion of an "object," which is a summary of analyses that I have discussed elsewhere (Rocknak 2013a, 2019, 2020). Here, we see that all objects are ideas of imagined causes, and so, may be imagined as otherwise. In Section 2.3, we examine Hume's notion of mathematical objects, specifically, numbers and geometrical objects, where we see that both kinds of objects—consistent with what we saw in Section 2.2—are

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ideas of imagined causes, and so, may be imagined as otherwise. In Section 2.4, we analyze the passages where Hume makes a distinction between demonstration vs. probability. Here, we see that because all ideas of objects (including mathematical objects) may be imagined as otherwise, the distinction between demonstration and probability fails. In Section 2.5 we examine the passages in *The Treatise* where Hume clearly expresses his *own* doubts pertaining to the distinction between demonstrations vs. probable claims. Finally, in Section 2.6, I show—in general terms—why Hume's reduction of demonstration to probability anticipates Quine's attack on the analytic/synthetic distinction.

2.2 General Overview of Hume's Notion of Objects

Elsewhere, I have argued that in Book I of *The Treatise*, Hume thinks that objects are ideas of imagined causes, and so, we imagine the external world (Rocknak 2013a, 2019, 2020). Here, I present a general summary of this interpretation of Hume, where the reader will be directed to the relevant details in the footnotes.

According to Hume, objects are complex ideas that are imagined to be the causes of our resembling but interrupted impressions. In the course of doing so, we imagine that these ideas have a "perfect identity" (THN 1.4.2.30, THN 1.4.6.6), i.e., they are imagined to be uninterrupted and invariable, or (roughly) equivalently, that they are continuous and distinct (Rocknak 2013a).[2]

There are three instances in Book I of *The Treatise* where Hume argues that imagining objects with a perfect identity is a condition of possibility for ordinary experience. These occur in: (a) "Of probability; and of the idea of cause and effect." (THN 1.3.2.1–2), where Hume discusses objects in terms of "secret causes," (b) "Of skepticism with regard to the senses" (THN 1.4.2.15–24), which involves a discussion of the role that the two levels of constancy and coherence of our impressions play in regard to our conception of objects and (c) "Of skepticism with regard to the senses" (THN 1.4.2.25–30) which comprises part 1 of 1.4.2's four-part system. Here, Hume discusses his "*principium individuationis*," i.e., the principle of identity.[3]

Ideas of objects that we imagine to admit of a perfect identity are similar to abstract ideas, although the former represents particular objects and the latter represents general objects. We may see why this is the case by first noting that, according to Hume, an idea of a general object is actually an idea of a particular object with a "certain term" (THN 1.1.7.1) attached to it. For instance, after experiencing a set of resembling ideas (say, of cars), we tend to refer to these ideas by the same name, despite any variations (THN 1.1.7.7). After doing so, when we hear the name 'car,' we

remember, or "revive" (THN 1.1.7.7) one of the particular ideas of the set of resembling car ideas which allows us to mentally access the other ideas that it resembles.

However, we don't call to mind every idea of a resembling particular car when hear the name 'car' (THN 1.1.7.7). Instead, we employ a "power" or "custom" to bring to mind as many as "we have occasion" (THN 1.1.7.7) to, i.e., we bring to mind as many as we need to at any given moment. This means that abstract, general ideas do not *exactly* represent particular ideas, because if they did, they would merely be particular ideas, rather than particular ideas accompanied with the power to recall members of the set of resembling perceptions, as needed.

Hume has a somewhat similar process in mind in the three sets of passages noted above regarding how we imagine *particular* objects—e.g., the idea of a particular car. We must experience a set, i.e., a "species" (THN 1.3.2.2) or a "number" (THN 1.4.2.26–28) of "resembling" (THN 1.3.2.2) perceptions, where these perceptions are interrupted. For instance, as I direct my gaze outside, I may have a number of resembling blue Honda impressions, which are interrupted as I blink my eyes, or turn away for an instant (THN 1.4.2.27). Upon experiencing this set of resembling, although interrupted perceptions, we bring to mind one of the particular ideas that belong to the set and imagine that it is the invariable and uninterrupted (or continuous and distinct) "secret cause" (THN 1.3.2.2) of the set. As a result of doing so, we imagine that this "secret cause" has a perfect identity (cf. Rocknak 2013a, 2019).

Thus, just as was the case with the idea of a general, abstract object, we employ a particular perception from a set of resembling ideas to represent the object. Moreover, as was also the case with an abstract idea, this particular perception (e.g., a car perception) does not *exactly* represent any specific sense impression. This is the case in regard to ideas of particular objects because (a) We imagine the idea at hand to have the properties of invariability and uninterruptedness (or continuity and distinctness), where we never perceive any of these properties with our senses (THN 1.4.2.15–24, THN 1.3.2.2, see also Rocknak [2013a, Part II]). And (b) We imagine that this idea is a *cause* of the set of resembling, interrupted perceptions, e.g., my blue Honda perceptions. We never "see or feel [these imagined causes]" (THN 1.3.2.3), so we cannot have had any perceptions of them being "constantly conjoined" (THN 1.1.1.8) with another impression. It is precisely in this respect they are "*secret* cause[s]" (THN 1.3.2.2; emphasis added, see also [Rocknak 2013a, Part II]). As such, Hume explains, our imagined idea of an object that admits of perfect identity is only "oblique[ly]" and "indirect[ly]" grounded in our experience (THN 1.4.2.21).

With this in mind, we realize that no idea of an abstract object can come about without first imagining the particular ideas that comprise it. For instance, in order to imagine an abstract idea of a car, we must first imagine a set of resembling ideas of particular cars, where each idea of a particular car, as noted above, is an imagined cause.

Moreover, according to Hume, any of these particular car ideas *could be imagined as otherwise*. For any cause, according to Hume, may be imagined as otherwise (THN 1.3.7.3–4) "though I cannot always believe it." (THN, Abstract, 18) This is the case, generally speaking, because the way in which we conceive of causes and effects is entirely based on custom, specifically, the repetitive experience of impressions as being "constantly conjoined" (THN 1.1.1.8). However, although some constant conjunctions are more regular than others, all of our experience is, in principle, *variable* (THN 1.3).[4] As a result, it is possible to imagine that any experience may be otherwise, and so, it is possible to imagine the conjunction of any combination of impressions as otherwise. Thus, according to Hume, *any* causal relation may be imagined as otherwise with no contradiction (THN 1.3.3.3, THN 1.3.6.1, THN 1.3.6.5, THN 1.3.7.3, THN 1.3.9.10, THN 1.3.14.13, and THN Abstract 11,18).

This means that no idea of a particular object is, in principle, fixed, i.e., invariable, because it is an imagined cause, despite the fact that we might *imagine* it to be invariable (and uninterrupted). For instance, I could imagine that the resembling impressions that I initially imagined to be caused by a white 2023 Audi are being caused by a 2018 white Volkswagen, although I might be stunned that I changed my mind (THN Abstract, 18).

Thus, according to Hume, any idea of an *abstract* object may also be imagined as otherwise. For instance, my abstract idea of a car might initially be represented by an idea of a 2023 white Audi—with what we imagine to be a gas engine—which calls to mind a set of resembling ideas of other particular cars—with what I imagine to be gas engines. However, I could, conceivably, imagine an idea of a 2023 white Audi with what I imagine to be an electric engine, and in turn bring to mind a set of similar imagined ideas of particular cars, with what I imagine to be electric engines. And so, my abstract idea of a car has *changed*—it now has an electric engine, not a gas engine.

2.3 Mathematical Objects

With Hume's conception of objects in general in mind, let us now consider his notion of mathematical objects, beginning with geometrical objects.

2.3.1 Geometrical Objects

Consider the following passage where Hume discusses the nature of geometrical objects:

> It appears, then, that the ideas which are most essential to geometry, viz. those of equality and inequality, of a right line and a plain surface, are far from being exact and determinate, according to our common method of conceiving them. Not only we are incapable of telling, if the case be in any degree doubtful, when such particular figures are equal; when such a line is a right one, and such a surface a plain one; but we can form no idea of that proportion, or of these figures, which is firm and invariable.
>
> (THN 1.2.4.29)

In other words, two of the most important ideas that we use to evaluate geometrical objects—equality and inequality—are "far from being exact and determinate." As a result, no evaluation of equality and inequality is either "firm or invariable." This is the case, Hume tells us immediately after the passage cited above, because the objects of our comparison—geometrical objects—are based on the senses, and, are *imagined*:

> Our appeal is still to the weak and fallible judgment, which we make from the appearance of the objects, and correct by a compass or common measure; and if we join the supposition of any farther correction, 'tis of such-a-one as is either useless or imaginary. In vain shou'd we have recourse to the common topic, and employ the supposition of a deity, whose omnipotence may enable him to form a perfect geometrical figure, and describe a right line without any curve or inflexion. As the ultimate standard of these figures is deriv'd from nothing but the *senses and imagination*, 'tis absurd to talk of any perfection beyond what these faculties can judge of; since the true perfection of any thing consists in its conformity to its standard.
>
> (THN 1.2.4.29; emphases added)

This is entirely consistent with what we saw to be the case in regard to particular objects in Section 2.2 of this chapter: ideas of geometrical objects are imagined, based on the senses; they are "deriv'd from nothing but the *senses and imagination*" (THN 1.2.4.29; emphases added). And although Hume is not explicit here, it makes interpretive sense to conclude that they are imagined in the same way that the ideas of any other particular object are imagined, i.e., ideas of geometrical objects are imagined to be

the uninterrupted and invariable (or continuous and distinct) causes of sets of interrupted and resembling perceptions (e.g., triangular perceptions). For if we did not imagine that these ideas were uninterrupted and invariable (or continuous and distinct) causes of our resembling and interrupted perceptions, we would be unable to conceive of them as "objects"—they would have no identity (Rocknak 2013a, 2019).

For instance, we might imagine that a particular uninterrupted and invariable (or continuous and distinct) triangular rock causes our interrupted but resembling triangular impressions. Moreover, we could imagine this particular shape to be otherwise. For instance, as I walk closer, my impressions change, and the sides no longer appear to me as equal. In fact, now it appears as though it has four sides. As a result, I imagine that these impressions are being caused by a rock with four unequal sides, although I might still call it a "triangle."

As a result, because an idea of an abstract triangle comprises particular ideas of triangles, it too, could be imagined as otherwise. For instance, although we might initially imagine an abstract idea of a triangle has having three sides, we could, in principle, imagine a number of ideas of objects that have four unequal sides, and call them triangles. Thus, our abstract idea of a "triangle" could, in principle, fundamentally change, just as our abstract idea of a car could change.

2.3.2 Numbers

With Hume's conception of geometrical objects in mind, let's now consider what he has to say about numbers. In T 1.1.7 *Of Abstract Ideas*, he writes:

> First then I observe, that when we mention any great number, such as a thousand, the mind has generally no adequate idea of it, but only a power of producing such an idea, by its adequate idea of the decimals, under which the number is comprehended.
>
> (THN 1.1.7.12)

In other words, a "great," i.e., a large number, is an idea. However, we do not have an "adequate" idea of a large number, but we "produ[ce] such an idea, by its adequate idea of the decimals." This is somewhat vague, but given that it occurs in the course of T 1.1.7, where Hume is explaining abstract ideas, we can conclude that he has an abstract idea in mind. More specifically, we "produce" an idea of a large number, e.g., the number 1,000, by using an "adequate idea of the decimals, under which the [large] number is comprehended." That is, we bring to mind an idea of a particular smaller number, e.g., the number 10, which, somehow—perhaps

by thinking of the equation 10 × 10 × 10— "produces" the number 1,000. As such, this would be an abstract idea in the respect that it is a particular idea of a number accompanied by ideas of other particular numbers.

With this in mind, now consider Hume's understanding of our ideas of smaller numbers. In T 1.2.2, he writes: " 'Tis evident, that existence in itself belongs only to unity, and is never applicable to number, but on account of the unites, of which the number is compos'd" (THN 1.2.2.3). In other words, "number"—particularly, smaller numbers—only exist in what appears to be an extensional sense but not in an intensional sense.

Recall that the distinction between extension and intension is, generally speaking, as follows: an extensional definition consists of all of the members of a given set. Or, in Hume's words, it is "compos'd" of the members, i.e., what he refers to as the "unites" in the passage cited immediately above. For instance, the extensional definition of "chair" would consist of a set of particular chairs. Meanwhile, an intensional definition of a chair would consist of a description of a chair, e.g., "Something that is sat on."

With this distinction in mind, now consider what Hume has to say immediately after the line cited above:

> Twenty men may be said to exist; but 'tis only because one, two, three, four, *&c.* are existent; and if you deny the existence of the latter, that of the former falls of course. 'Tis therefore utterly absurd to suppose any number to exist, and yet deny the existence of unites.
>
> (THN 1.2.2.3)

That is, if we deny the existence of the 20 particulars (the "unites"), we deny the existence of the "number" 20. It would be absurd to claim otherwise. In the immediately following passage, Hume employs the term "extension" in the sense explained above:

> and as extension is always a number, according to the common sentiment of metaphysicians, and never resolves itself into any unite or indivisible quantity, it follows, that extension can never at all exist. 'Tis in vain to reply, that any determinate quantity of extension is an unite…For by the same rule these twenty men *may be consider'd as an unite*. The whole globe of the earth, nay the whole universe *may be consider'd as an unite*. That term of unity is merely a fictitious denomination, which the mind may apply to any quantity of objects it collects together; nor can such an unity any more exist alone than number can, as being in reality a true number.
>
> (THN 1.2.2.3)

Hume's thoughts here may be parsed as follows:

1 Some metaphysicians claim that because "extension" is a collection of particular things (is a "number"), it cannot be an "indivisible quantity," and so "extension can never at all exist."
2 But "Tis in vain" to reply to this claim that extension *does* in fact exist, but as a unified, single thing, i.e., as a "unite."
3 For this would mean that a collection of 20 men is actually one thing, i.e., a "unite," and as such, does not consist of 20 individual men. Indeed, the "earth" and "the whole universe" would, in this respect, be thought of as a unity, which, Hume implies, would deny the existence of the particular things that respectively comprise the earth and the universe.
4 Instead, we must realize that such a unity is "merely a fictitious denomination" that cannot exist without the 20 men that comprise it.

This means that we could imagine the idea of any smaller number as otherwise—e.g., the number "twenty"—because the particular objects that comprise smaller numbers can be imagined as otherwise. For instance, we could imagine any of the particular "objects," i.e., the ideas of "men" that comprise the ideas of 20 "men" as otherwise. For instance, we could imagine the idea of one man as ideas of *two* "men," or ideas of *three* "men," etc. This could easily occur if the nature of our impressions shift, e.g., we move to the right or the left, or perhaps the light changes, so what we previously imagined to be an idea of one "man," we now imagine as an idea of one "man" standing directly in front of another "man." As a result, we can imagine that the number "twenty" is the number "twenty-one."

Concomitantly, this means that our ideas of larger numbers may be imagined as otherwise as well. For instance, the number 1,000—which, as we saw, is "produc[ed]" (THN 1.1.7.12) by smaller numbers, e.g., an equation comprising ideas smaller numbers, e.g., 10 × 10 × 10—could shift. For as we just saw, our idea of the number 10 depends on our impressions, which could shift, and so our idea of the number 10 could shift to become an idea of the number 11 which in turn shifts the equation that "produce[s]" (THN 1.1.7.12) the idea of the number 1,000 to 11 × 11 × 11, which would give us the idea of the number 1,331 instead.

2.4 Knowledge vs Probability

With Hume's notion of ideas of objects in mind—particularly, ideas of geometrical and arithmetical objects—let us now consider those passages in *The Treatise* where he makes a distinction between "comparisons of

ideas" and "matters of fact." As noted in the Introduction to this chapter, this comparison may occur as the result of "intuition" or a "demonstrative" process. Moreover, "matters of fact" can be imagined as "being otherwise" while "comparison[s] of ideas" cannot be imagined as otherwise without generating a contradiction (THN 1.3.7, THN Abstract, 33, 34, 35). Concomitantly, intuition and demonstration produce knowledge claims while "matters of fact" may only produce "probable" claims (THN 1.3.1, T 1.3.11.2). Arithmetical knowledge is the best example of demonstrative knowledge (THN 1.3.1.5–6).

We begin by taking a look at THN 1.3.1.1:

> [philosophical] relations may be divided into two classes; into such as depend entirely on ideas, which we compare together, and such as may be chang'd without any change in the ideas. 'Tis from the idea of a triangle, that we discover the relation of equality, which its three angles bear to two right ones; and this relation is invariable, as long as our idea remains the same. On the contrary, the relations of *contiguity* and *distance* between two objects may be chang'd merely by the alteration of their place, without any change on the objects themselves or on their ideas; and the place depends on a hundred different accidents, which cannot be foreseen by the mind. 'Tis the same case with *identity* and *causation*.
>
> (THN 1.3.1.1)

Hume's thoughts here may be parsed as follows, where we will also draw on what Hume has to say shortly after this paragraph:

1 There are two classes of philosophical[5] relation:
   a Those relations that "depend entirely on ideas," which we compare together, where these relations remain the same "as long as our idea remains the same." For instance, we may "discover the relation of equality" from a triangle (by comparing it's three angles to two right angles), but only if our idea of a triangle does not change. Thus—as long as these ideas do not change—these relations are *invariable*. They consist of resemblance, contrariety, degrees in quality, and proportions of quantity and number (THN 1.3.1.2).
   b Those relations that change because the "place" in which the "objects" are located may change. For instance, two "objects" that are initially located next to each other, may not be located next to each other in the following instant, thanks to "a hundred different accidents." This means that these relations are *variable*, and include contiguity and distance.

2 The relation of identity is also variable. This is the case, Hume explains shortly after the paragraph cited above, because two "objects" may be "perfectly resembling" (T 1.3.1.1), and so, it seems, be *identical* to each other, and even may occasionally appear at the exact same place, but at different times. Nevertheless, Hume tells us, they are "numerically different" (THN 1.3.1.1) simply because there are two of them. Thus, Hume suggests here that identity can only occur when an "object" is identical to itself, where, as such, it is only *one* "object." As soon as there are two or more perfectly resembling "objects," identity is lost. As a result, the relation of identity is *variable*.
3 Meanwhile the relation of cause and effect is a relation "of which we receive information from experience" (THN 1.3.1.1). As a result, it is also *variable* because experience is variable.

There is much to be discussed in regard to this summary, but first, let's call attention to the fact that the invariability that holds of "comparisons of ideas" is a function of the invariability of the ideas involved in the comparison, e.g., the idea of a triangle (recall 1 a. above). Yet, as we saw in Sections 2.2–2.3 of this chapter, we can imagine the idea of *any* object as otherwise, including the idea of a triangle, particular or abstract. Immediately then, we see that this presents a serious problem for the invariability of demonstrative reasoning.

Moreover, note that here (specifically in 2. above), Hume acknowledges that the relation of identity is *variable*; one "object"—that is identical to itself—can become two or more "perfectly resembling" "objects," and so, lose its identity. For ease of reference, we will henceforth refer to the identity that Hume discusses here as identity *simpliciter*. This is different from the "perfect identity" that we discussed in Section 2.2, where we saw that an idea of an object admits of *perfect* identity when we imagine it to be the uninterrupted and invariable (or continuous and distinct) cause of a set of resembling perceptions. As such, as we saw, perfect identity is also variable because any cause may be imagined as otherwise. Regardless, it is clear that the identity of any idea of an object—*simpliciter* or perfect—is variable, and so, once again, it presents a serious problem for the invariability of demonstrative claims.[6]

Finally, here Hume makes it clear that any causal claim is variable because it is based on experience, which is also variable. This reinforces the fact that any idea of an object that admits of perfect identity is variable because it is an imagined cause.

Now consider THN 1.3.1.5, which occurs shortly after the passage examined above:

> [A]lgebra and arithmetic [are] the only sciences, in which we can carry on a chain of reasoning to any degree of intricacy, and yet preserve a

> perfect exactness and certainty. We are possest of a precise standard, by which we can judge of the equality and proportion of numbers; and according as they correspond or not to that standard, we determine their relations, without any possibility of error.
>
> (THN 1.3.1.5)

In other words, algebra and arithmetic are the only "sciences" that admit of "perfect exactness and certainty." This is the case because we can judge the "equality and proportion of numbers" with an "exact standard" that allows us to "determine" the relations that hold in algebra and arithmetic "without any possibility of error." However, as we saw in Section 2.3 of this chapter, even this "standard" must be variable. For if our imagined idea of any number should vary, then the "exact standard" that we use to judge the "equality and proportion" of that number in relation to other numbers, or even to itself, would correspondingly vary. For instance, as explained in Section 2.3 of this chapter, our idea of the number 20 could shift to an idea of the number 21, and so, any equation that involved the idea of the number 20 would correspondingly shift, e.g., "20 = (10 x 2)" would be false, for the equation would have shifted to "21 = (10 x 2)."

Now consider THN 1.3.7.3:

> nor is it possible for the imagination to conceive anything contrary to a demonstration. But as in reasoning from causation, and concerning matters of fact, this absolute necessity cannot take place, and the imagination is free to conceive of both sides of the question.
>
> (THN 1.3.7.3)[7]

However, as we saw in Section 2.3 of this chapter, and above in regard to THN 1.3.1.1 and 1.3.1.5, it is only impossible to "conceive anything contrary to a demonstration" if the ideas involved do not vary, i.e., if the identity of any of the "objects" involved in the relation do not vary. Yet, as we have also seen, according to Hume, any idea of any object may, in principle, vary because no identity is invariable, whether identity is *simpliciter* or perfect identity. Thus, in principle, any demonstration may be imagined as otherwise.

2.5 Hume's Doubts

Having illustrated the problems regarding Hume's distinction between knowledge and probability in light of the fact that all ideas of objects are variable, thanks to Hume's conception of identity—*simpliciter* and perfect—we must now analyze the textual evidence comprising Hume's *own* doubts regarding this distinction. We will see that these doubts are

not only extensive but that they are entirely consistent with the problems that I have pointed out above.

2.5.1 Geometry: Hume's Doubts

First consider THN 1.2.4.10:

> [T]he objects of geometry, those surfaces, lines and points, whose proportions and positions it examines, are mere ideas in the mind; and not only never did, but never can exist in nature. They never did exist; for no one will pretend to draw a line or make a surface entirely conformable to the definition: They never can exist; for we may produce demonstrations from these very ideas to prove, that they are impossible. (THN 1.2.4.10)

Hume's remarks here are fairly straightforward: we do not experience the "objects" of geometry "in nature." That is, we do not have sense impressions of perfect "surfaces, lines and points" etc. Instead, these "objects" are "mere ideas of the mind."

As a result, Hume continues, geometry is not a "precise" or "exact" science (THN 1.2.4.17). This means, Hume writes—in no uncertain terms—that the *relations* that hold of the ideas of geometrical "objects" are inexact as well:

> It appears, then, that the ideas which are most essential to geometry, viz. those of equality and inequality, of a right line and a plain surface, are far from being exact and determinate, according to our common method of conceiving them. Not only we are incapable of telling, if the case be in any degree doubtful, when such particular figures are equal; when such a line is a right one, and such a surface a plain one; but we can form no idea of that proportion, or of these figures, which is firm and invariable. Our appeal is still to the weak and fallible judgment, which we make from the appearance of the objects, and correct by a compass or common measure; and if we join the supposition of any farther correction, 'tis of such-a-one as is either useless or imaginary. (THN 1.2.4.29)

That is:

1 "Equality and inequality," which are "most essential to geometry" are "far from being exact and determinate."
2 This is the case because these relations obtain ideas of "objects" that are based on sense impressions: "Our appeal is still to the weak and fallible judgment which we make from the appearance of objects."

3 For instance, we might have impressions of what we imagine to be two triangular rocks ("figures"), and, by sight, determine that they are "equal," where this equality can only be a rough equivalence which we then attempt to "correct by a compass or common measure."
4 We may correct this idea of equality still further, but this correction is "either useless or imaginary."[8]

Hume makes very similar points in THN 1.3.1.4:

> I have already observ'd, that geometry, or the art, by which we fix the proportions of figures; tho' it much excels both in universality and exactness, the loose judgments of the senses and imagination; yet never attains a perfect precision and exactness. It's first principles are still drawn from the general appearance of the objects; and that appearance can never afford us any security, when we examine the prodigious minuteness of which nature is susceptible …'Tis the same case with most of the primary decisions of the mathematics.
>
> (THN 1.3.1.4)[9]

His thoughts here may be parsed as follows:

1 Although geometry does excel "both in universality and exactness" it "never attains a perfect precision and exactness."
2 This is the case because the "first principles" of geometry are based on the senses, i.e., "the general appearance of the objects."
3 These appearances "can never afford us any security."
4 Hume concludes: " 'Tis the same case with most of the primary decisions of mathematics."

Thus, in sum, because all of the ideas of objects of geometry are imagined, based on "appearances[s]," i.e., impressions, and all impressions, are, in principle, variable, all of our ideas of the relations that hold between these ideas of objects are variable as well. Thus, although Hume does not explicitly mention that geometrical objects are imagined *causes* here, his doubts concerning the "precis[ion]" and "exact[ness]" (THN 1.3.1.4) of geometry are consistent with the problems outlined in Section 2.3.1 of this chapter. Specifically, we saw that, according to Hume, the "objects" of geometry—if they are to have an identity—must be imagined to be the uninterrupted and invariable causes of our interrupted and resembling impressions. As such, these ideas of geometrical objects must be variable, explaining in more precise terms, why Hume claims that they—and the relations that hold of them—are variable in the passages cited above.

2.5.2 Arithmetic: Hume's Doubts

Hume's doubts about demonstrative knowledge are not limited to just geometry. Rather, he has clear concerns about the relations that hold between numbers as well. But before we discuss those concerns, we must take into account an argument he makes immediately before he discusses the probability inherent in algebra and arithmetic. In particular, in THN 1.4.1 he writes:

> In all demonstrative sciences the rules are certain and infallible; but when we apply them, our fallible and uncertain faculties are very apt to depart from them, and fall into error…Our reason must be consider'd as a kind of cause, of which truth is the natural effect; but such-a-one as by the irruption of other causes, and by the inconstancy of our mental powers, may frequently be prevented. By this means all knowledge degenerates into probability; and this probability is greater or less, according to our experience of the veracity or deceitfulness of our understanding, and according to the simplicity or intricacy of the question.
>
> (THN 1.4.1.1)

Hume's argument here is as follows:

1 The rules that are obtained from all demonstrative sciences are "certain and infallible."
2 However, the "faculties" that we apply to these rules are "fallible and uncertain."
3 Thus, our "reason" is a "kind of cause" and its effect is the "truth."
4 But this cause (i.e., our reason) is often interrupted by other causes and our faulty mental powers.
5 Thus, "*all knowledge degenerates into probability*," (emphases added).

Thus, in short, all demonstrations (knowledge) reduced to matters of fact (probability) thanks to our inability to correctly follow the "rules." This problem is distinct from the problems noted above concerning demonstrations and intuited claims, specifically, the fact that because any "object" can be imagined otherwise, any demonstration or intuited claim can be imagined as otherwise. However, in the immediately following paragraph, Hume begins to acknowledge that this too is a problem, and, confusingly, he begins to retract his claim that the rules that are obtained from "all demonstrative sciences," particularly, arithmetic, are actually "certain and infallible" (THN 1.4.1.1):

> There is no Algebraist nor Mathematician so expert in his science, as to place entire confidence in any truth immediately upon his discovery of

> it, or regard it as any thing, but a mere probability. Every time he runs over his proofs, his confidence encreases; but still more by the approbation of his friends; and is rais'd to its utmost perfection by the universal assent and applauses of the learned world. Now 'tis evident, that this gradual encrease of assurance is nothing but the addition of new probabilities, and is deriv'd from the constant union of causes and effects, according to past experience and observation.
>
> (THN 1.4.1.2)

That is:

1 All Algebraists and/or Mathematicians initially regard their conclusions to be "mere probability[ies]."
2 But the more they "run over" their proofs, the more confident they become and the less probable they seem.
3 In fact, as friends praise the proofs and the "learned world" lauds them, they become still more confident, to the point where the proofs are "rais'd to [their] utmost perfection."
4 However, this is a sham. This increase in confidence is "nothing but the addition of new probabilities" which are based on causes and effects, and so on "experience and observation."

Here, Hume does *not* seem to be claiming that knowledge reduces to probability due to our inability to follow the rules. Rather, he seems to be claiming that the rules themselves are probable. For the application of more rules, i.e., the more we "run over" them, is merely the addition of "new probabilities."[10]

Hume makes it clearer that this is what he means in the next paragraph:

> In accompts of any length or importance, Merchants seldom trust to the infallible certainty of numbers for their security; but by the artificial structure of the accompts, produce a probability beyond what is deriv'd from the skill and experience of the accomptant. For that is plainly of itself some degree of probability; tho' uncertain and variable, according to the degrees of his experience and length of the accompt. Now as none will maintain, that our assurance in a long numeration exceeds probability, I may safely affirm, that there scarce is any proposition concerning numbers, of which we can have a fuller security.
>
> (THN 1.4.1.3)

That is:

1 Merchants rarely think or trust that numbers are "infallib[ly] certain."
2 Instead, they trust the "artificial stricture" (structure) of their accounts.

3 This structure produces a high degree of "probability."
4 Thus, no one will "maintain" that "our assurance" involving any "long numeration exceeds probability."
5 Thus, it's safe to conclude that *no* "proposition concerning numbers" exceeds probability.

Here, Hume makes it clear that the "stricture" (structure) of our accounting system—i.e., the *rules* that we use to keep our accounts—is "artificial" and probable. Thus, the problem does not, in fact, lie with the inability to apply the rules. Additionally, he claims no merchant trusts the "infallible certainty" of "numbers," which seems to mean that they don't trust the nature of "numbers" themselves.

This doubt is more pronounced in the immediately following paragraph:

> For 'tis easily possible, by gradually diminishing the numbers, to reduce the longest series of addition to the most simple question, which can be form'd, to an addition of two single numbers; and upon this supposition we shall find it impracticable to shew the precise limits of knowledge and of probability, or discover that particular number, at which the one ends and the other begins. But knowledge and probability are of such contrary and disagreeing natures, that they cannot well run insensibly into each other, and that because they will not divide, but must be either entirely present, or entirely absent. Besides, if any single addition were certain, every one wou'd be so, and consequently the whole or total sum; unless the whole can be different from all its parts. I had almost said, that this was certain; but I reflect, that it must reduce itself, as well as every other reasoning, and from knowledge degenerate into probability.
>
> (THN 1.4.1.3)

We may parse this argument as follows:

1 We could reduce any long series of numerical additions to smaller components, e.g., to "an addition of two single numbers." As such, we could attempt to eradicate the probability inherent in a long (probable) series of additions to a series of short (seemingly certain) additions of just "two single numbers."
2 But this would mean that it is "impracticable" to show "the precise limits of knowledge and probability." For where, precisely, Hume seems to mean, would the probability that admits of long numerations end and the certainty that allegedly admits of short numerations begin?
3 But if we can't discover where probability ends and certainty begins, we can't conclude that long numerations are somehow both probable and

certain. For knowledge and probability are mutually exclusive: "they cannot well run into each other [and so] they must be entirely present, or entirely absent."

4 Moreover, if one "single addition were certain," then the whole lengthy series of additions would be certain, and we wouldn't run into the problem noted in the passage cited just above this one, i.e., the conclusion that long numerations are probable.

5 Thus, we have no choice but to conclude that the numeration, "*as well as every other reasoning… must reduce itself, as well as every other reasoning, and from knowledge reduce to probability*" (emphases added).

6 Hume repeats his conclusion that all demonstrations reduce to probability twice in the next paragraph: "*all knowledge resolves itself into probability*, and becomes at last of the same nature with that evidence, which we employ in common life …" "*demonstration is subject to the controul of probability*" (THN 1.4.1.5; emphases added).

In sum, then, in the course of Hume's analysis of arithmetic, we see Hume retract his initial claim that the problem with the demonstrations lies with our inability to apply rules to claim instead that all cases of arithmetical reasoning, even cases where we compute short, easy equations (where there would be no problem applying the rules), are probable. As a result, it seems that the problem must lie with the nature of numbers themselves—they are variable, as we saw to be the case in Section 2.3.2 of this chapter.[11]

Thus, at this point, it should be clear that ultimately—despite his claims to the contrary (recall Section 2.4 of this chapter)—Hume did not believe that there was a mutually exclusive distinction between demonstrations and matters of fact; i.e., a mutually exclusive distinction between knowledge and probability, where the former is certain and the latter is not.[12] Rather, as Hume clearly tells us in THN 1.4.1—on four separate occasions—demonstrative claims "degenerate" (THN 1.4.1.3) into probable claims.[13]

2.6 Quine's Attack on the Analytic/Synthetic Distinction: A Brief Overview

One might attempt to defend Hume's notion of demonstrations from the fact that all ideas of objects may be imagined as otherwise as follows: simply stipulate that certain meanings, e.g., the meaning of the idea of "triangle," or the meaning of the idea of the number "twenty," never change. In other words, establish a *convention* that these meanings are fixed, and so, are not variable. As a result, the relations that hold between these meanings would not be variable either, and so, it seems, would remain certain. Some

might argue that this is what Hume was trying to do when he wrote in T 1.3.1.1 (discussed in Section 2.4 of this chapter): "'Tis from the idea of a triangle, that we discover the relation of equality, which it's three angles bear to two right ones; *this relation is invariable, as long as our idea remains the same*" (emphases added).

However, this was simply not an option for Hume. Merely stipulating that, e.g., a triangle, has a necessary nature such that our ideas of it never change would have stood in direct conflict with Hume's opposition to metaphysics and the "certainty" that it touts (THN Intro 7, 9–10).[14] Moreover, and relatedly, this would stand in direct conflict with Hume's notion of the variable nature of our ideas of objects, explained above—according to Hume, no idea of an object is invariable, regardless if we insisted otherwise, i.e., tried to establish it by "convention."

As a result, Hume anticipates the contemporary epistemologist Quine, who famously argued that there is no distinction between necessary and probable claims. Rather, like Hume, he argued that all knowledge claims are probable. More specifically, he claimed that there is no distinction between "analytic" and "synthetic" claims, where analytic claims are alleged to be true in virtue of their meanings and synthetic claims are true in virtue of empirical facts. For instance, an example of an analytic claim is "all bachelors are unmarried men," which is necessarily true because of the meanings of the terms "bachelor" and "unmarried men." Meanwhile, an example of a synthetic claim is "The sky is blue." As such, this claim is merely probable because experience is variable, and so, empirical facts are variable (Quine (1953)[15]; see also Rocknak (2010, 2013b).

In brief, and in very general terms, Quine argued that all analytic claims are reduced to synthetic claims because, like Hume, he claims that all meanings are variable—because we cannot stipulate an invariable meaning without being circular. For instance, in order to stipulate what the meaning of a word is, e.g., "bachelor," we must first know what "bachelor" means.[16]

As a result, as we saw in Sections 2.2–2.5 of this chapter, Hume clearly anticipated Quine, albeit in a general, but very powerful sense: all allegedly certain claims reduced to probable claims. So why didn't Quine credit Hume?[17] He certainly read Hume, even teaching a semester-long course on him at Harvard (Quine 1985, 194). However, Quine admits he was simply not interested in figuring out what Hume thought (Quine 1985, 194). But it's clear that he and Hume were epistemological bedfellows; Hume dismantled the distinction between necessary and probable claims long before Quine would make his career by claiming to be the first empiricist to do so.

Notes

1 For the sake of brevity, I will, hereafter, for the most part, refer to demonstrative and intuited claims as "demonstrative" because the distinction between demonstrations and intuitions does not pertain to the goals of this chapter, i.e., it does not matter if we immediately "intuit" the relation between two "objects" or use a reflective comparing process.
2 For more detail, see Rocknak (2013a, 88–89, 104, 122, 153–155, 181, 182).
3 Although Hume discusses variants of 1.4.2's principle of identity in THN 1.4.6, the bulk of 1.4.6 consists of giving three separate accounts of the transition from the vulgar perspective to the philosophical perspective. See Rocknak (2013a, 189–217) for more detail. For an extensive account of how Hume's transcendental account of imagining objects differs from the philosophical account and the vulgar account, see Rocknak (2007, 2013a, 48–51, 244–245).
4 However, although our experience is, in principle variable, and so is not certain, some of it is *regular*. See Rocknak (2020) for more details.
5 For the purpose of this chapter, we need not broach what Hume means by "philosophical." For more on this term, see Rocknak (2013a, 29–52, 47–51, 92–95, 254–261). See also DePierris (2002), Owen (1999, 151–153), and Schliesser (2007).
6 We can square Hume's notion of identity, *simpliciter*, with his notion of perfect identity, as follows: We may imagine that, e.g., our idea of a "chair" has a perfect identity in virtue of imagining that it is the cause of our resembling chair perceptions. This idea also admits of identity *simpliciter* if we imagine that it is one chair, i.e., that it is identical to itself. However, if, for example, a friend of mine buys what appears to be the exact same kind of chair, and I experience a set of resembling perceptions from this "chair" that exactly resemble the perceptions that I experience with my "chair," this does not mean that the two imagined ideas of "perfectly resembling" "chairs" are identical. Rather, they are two ideas, and so, are numerically different. See also THN 1.4.2.25–43, where Hume discusses the role that unity and number play in regard to perfect identity, which, as noted above, appears to be distinct from the identity discussed in THN 1.3.1.1. See also Rocknak (2013a, Chapter 7), and for an alternative point of view (Baxter 2008).
7 See also THN Abstract, 33, 34, 35 for similar claims.
8 Hume repeats and clarifies this point on THN 1.4.2.22, where he references THN 1.2.4, cited above.
9 See also THN 1.3.1.6
10 Indeed, according to Hume, *all* "rules" are probable; see Rocknak (2020). For an alternative view on Hume's skepticism in *The Treatise*, and how it relates to *The Enquiry*, see Qu (2020).
11 See also the conclusion of Book I of *The Treatise* (THN 1.4.7.2) where Hume makes it very clear that he has cast doubt on mathematics, which is supposed to be the bastion of demonstration (THN 1.3.1.5).
12 This is contrary to many, if not most, Hume scholars, including, most notably, Kemp Smith (1941), Flew (1961), Stroud (1977), and Garrett (1997) as well

as those scholars noted in the Introduction to this chapter, i.e., Stove (1973), Millican (1995, 2002), Mackie (1979), and Beauchamp and Rosenberg (1981).

13 It is worth noting that even Hume's claim that all knowledge must degenerate into probability, is, itself, probable. However, a discussion of this point would take us too far afield. See THN 1.4.7 for more details.

14 Cf. Garrett (1997, 30–33), Millican (2002) and Rocknak (2013a, 2020).

15 Quine discusses this issue in multiple places, in addition to his 1953 article "The Two Dogmas of Empiricism" (originally published in 1951 in *The Philosophical Review*). For instance, see at least, "Two Dogmas in Retrospect" (Quine 1991), "Five Milestones of Empiricism" (Quine 1981), "Truth by Convention" (Quine, 1976), and *Dear Carnap, Dear Van* (Creath 1990).

16 For more detail, see Quine (1951), i.e., "The Two Dogmas of Empiricism." See also Rocknak (2010) and (2013b), where I explain Quine's argument in detail.

17 Quine mysteriously did not cite Morton White (1950) either, who attacked the analytic–synthetic distinction a year before Quine published "The Two Dogmas of Empiricism" in *The Philosophical Review*.

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Part II
Doxastic Attitudes

3 Hume on Pyrrhonian Scepticism and Suspension of Judgement

Verena Wagner and Scott Stapleford

3.1 Introduction

The concept of suspending judgement has been pivotal in the history of philosophy, primarily as a means to other ends such as attaining tranquillity in Pyrrhonian Scepticism, securing knowledge for René Descartes, or accessing reality without bias for Edmund Husserl. However, discussions of the nature of suspension of judgement and its specific normative profile have been nearly non-existent in historical accounts. In contemporary epistemology, suspending judgement is recognized only recently as a third doxastic stance, alongside belief and disbelief, representing a phenomenon to be studied in its own right.

It comes as no surprise that David Hume is not known for discussing suspension of judgement as the third doxastic stance. There are just a few occasions on which he explicitly mentioned "suspence" of judgement, and most of these are found in critical notes on Pyrrhonian Scepticism. In the Pyrrhonian view, the suspension of judgement is an instrument to acquire ease of mind with respect to questions about reality. Hume contended in the first *Enquiry* that the Pyrrhonian use of suspension is "excessive" (EHU 12.21, SBN 158–9), and he had Philo say in the *Dialogues* that "nothing could be more ridiculous than the principles of the ancient *Pyrrhonians*" (DNR 1.6, KS 133). Hume's evaluation of Pyrrhonian Scepticism is ambivalent, however. On the one hand, he thought that the principles Pyrrhonians used to elicit suspension of judgement are no match for "the more powerful principles of our nature" (EHU 12.21, SBN 158–9) because the latter necessitate metaphysical beliefs even in the absence of rational justification; on the other hand, Hume admitted that Pyrrhonian principles would be "difficult, if not impossible, to refute" (ibid.), at least in theory. Although we cannot refute sceptical arguments purporting to show that our metaphysical beliefs are unjustified, we are often psychologically unable to maintain a neutral opinion on these matters because "nature breaks the force of all sceptical arguments in time" (THN 1.4.1.12, SBN 186–7).

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To find out what Hume might have thought about suspension of judgement as a doxastic attitude or stance, we will review Hume's critique of the Pyrrhonian technique of using suspension of judgement as an alternative pathway to tranquillity and discuss interpretations of this critique. We wish to resist the conclusion that Hume's critique of Pyrrhonian Scepticism is indicative of there being no substantial role for doxastic neutrality or suspension of judgement in Hume's epistemology. Against the backdrop of contemporary debates on suspension of judgement, we will note how various forms of neutrality fit into Hume's psychologically informed epistemology. In fact, we think that Hume's meta-discussion of philosophical inquiry links well with the contemporary debate on norms of inquiry and the so-called "zetetic turn" in epistemology. Discussing Hume's ideas on seeking relief from the disturbance caused by pressing questions one cannot answer will also illuminate the contemporary debate, particularly because the latter involves a tendency to neglect the psychology of doubt, indecision, and suspension.

In Section 3.2, we will explain how this concept has evolved—from suspension as lack of opinion to suspension as a positive doxastic stance or attitude. We will discuss competing interpretations of the concept and the debates connected with it, including its role in inquiry. In Section 3.3, we will give a detailed account of something we call *Pyrrhonian Transition*, which involves a shift from equipollence to tranquillity through suspension of judgement. This will be a necessary preliminary to understanding both Hume's critique of the concept (or interpretations of his critique) and its possible connections with contemporary debates on suspension of judgement. Section 3.4 outlines Hume's critique of Pyrrhonian Scepticism, primarily through discussions of well-known interpretations—Richard Popkin (1951), David Norton (1982), and Louis Loeb (2002). Questions left open by Sextus Empiricus about the *Pyrrhonian Transition* will resurface in the various interpretations of Hume's critique, for which the contemporary debate will prove useful. In Section 3.5, we conclude that Hume's epistemology is not only compatible with positive notions of suspension of judgement but that his philosophical method in general requires various forms of neutrality and suspension of which he made frequent use. Hume appears to have accepted two roles for suspension in inquiry, both distinct from mere indecision. This aligns well with ongoing debates regarding suspension and inquiry in recent epistemology.

3.2 Suspension of Judgement in Contemporary Epistemology

In modern epistemology, the suspension of judgement is no longer viewed solely as an instrument for the pursuit of other goals such as attaining tranquillity or secure knowledge. Yet until recently, suspension of judgement

was commonly thought of as a privative state, constituted by the mere absence of an opinion. It is mainly due to the work of Jane Friedman (2013a b, 2017a b, 2019, 2000) that suspension of judgement has now come to be seen as a positive doxastic notion with its own rational profile. Recent years have seen a growing interest in what this notion amounts to, and we will briefly outline the main contours of this debate.

Friedman (2013a) argued that suspending judgement is more than just the absence of opinion because this would include not only entities incapable of holding doxastic attitudes but also subjects who have never thought about the target question or do not understand the concepts occurring in it. To avoid these complications, Friedman proposes that suspending judgement is a doxastic attitude adopted for a reason and that, as such, it differs fundamentally from mere indecision or ignorance. Many epistemologists agree on this point.[1] A more controversial claim from Friedman is that the attitude in question is *sui generis* and that it cannot be reduced to more familiar mental states.[2] Moreover, suspending judgement is said to be an interrogative attitude that has a question as its content and is thus intrinsically linked to inquiry (Friedman, 2013b, 2017a).

By contrast, metacognitivist accounts (Crawford, 2004; Rosenkranz, 2007; Raleigh, 2021) reduce suspension of judgement to higher-order beliefs about one's own deficient epistemic situation. Specifically, these accounts suggest that suspension of judgement or agnosticism consists of a belief that one lacks sufficient knowledge or evidence to make a definitive judgement about a particular proposition. This belief about one's epistemic limitations serves as a rational and explanatory basis for why an individual neither believes nor disbelieves the proposition in question. Metacognitivists argue that this state of suspended judgement is maintained not merely through an absence of belief or disbelief, but through a doxastic stance that reflects a person's epistemic assessment of their own evidential situation.

Wagner (2022) distinguishes between mere indecision and the settled state of agnostic neutrality. She takes the metacognitive belief about one's own deficient evidential situation as a potential epistemic *reason* to suspend judgement agnostically but argues that there needs to be an additional commitment on the part of the subject to bring about the act of suspending judgement. This commitment is provided by an evaluative aspect of endorsing one's own de facto indecision as the appropriate result of one's inquiry. This is what settles one's indecision in the agnostic way and terminates inquiry. Merely believing that one's evidence is deficient does not bring about the transition from mere indecision to agnostic neutrality because it is psychologically possible to believe that one's evidence for the truth of a proposition p is insufficient but believe p nonetheless. Believing that one should suspend does not make it so.[3]

Finally, there is an interpretation that analyses suspension of judgement as a deliberate, future-oriented act where a subject intentionally refrains from making a judgement. This act involves a decision to defer judgement until better or more information is available (McGrath, 2021a b; Wagner, forthcoming). In contrast to interpretations focusing on agnosticism that consider suspension of judgement to be inquiry-closing, this account views suspension of judgement as *maintaining* inquiry and open-mindedness. Consequently, one of the key questions in the contemporary debate is whether there is just *one* neutral state of mind—often referred to as *the* third doxastic stance—which can capture all the cases that we would intuitively classify as suspension of judgement. Some accounts explicitly suggest that there must be different ways of being neutral and different ways of suspending judgement (Lord & Sylvan, 2021; Staffel, 2019; Ferrari & Incurvati, 2022; McGrath, 2021a b; Wagner, 2022; forthcoming). As we will argue in Section 3.5, Hume's meta-discussion of philosophical inquiry employs two different kinds of neutrality as well: on the one hand, he opts for agnostic neutrality for established limits of philosophical research on certain topics, and, on the other hand, he recommends open-minded inquiry and caution for philosophical investigations into new domains.

In the next section, we will discuss in some detail the Pyrrhonian view on suspension of judgement. This will provide us with the relevant background to understand Hume's critique (or interpretations of Hume's critique) as well as potential connections to the contemporary debate.

3.3 The Pyrrhonian Transition from Equipollence to Tranquillity

Part of the Pyrrhonian aim, or "causal principle," lies in finding ease of mind or tranquillity (ataraxia) from bothersome questions. Sextus Empiricus frames it this way in the *Outlines of Scepticism* (PH): "the aim of the [Pyrrhonian] Sceptic is tranquillity in matters of opinion" (PH I.25).[4] Troubled by a puzzling question, subjects may try to dissolve it by working out the answer:

> Men of talent, troubled by the anomaly in things and puzzled as to which of them they should rather assent to, came to investigate what in things is true and what false, thinking that by deciding these issues they would become tranquil.
>
> (PH I.12)

As Sextus tells us, the (to-become) Pyrrhonian Sceptics had once assumed that finding the correct answer to a puzzling question is the route from puzzlement and disturbance to tranquillity and ease of mind. However, they discovered by accident that there is another route to tranquillity

that does not require determining what is true or false. When the later Pyrrhonians "came upon an equipollent dispute" and were "unable to decide this [dispute], they suspended judgement" (PH I.26). Unexpectedly, this led to the desired ease of mind: "And when they suspended judgement, tranquillity in matters of opinion followed fortuitously" (PH I.26).

Let us call the transition from a state of equipollence to a calm state of mind by way of suspension the *Pyrrhonian Transition*. Sextus described this transition as a sequence of occurrences which the future Pyrrhonians observed, but he did not provide a detailed psychological or normative explanation. For Sextus, the important insight is that this apparently natural transition can be used as an alternative pathway or as an instrument for attaining tranquillity. Consequently, the Pyrrhonian Sceptics' focus lies in establishing equipollence by providing opposing arguments such that suspension of judgement can follow, which then leads to tranquillity. According to a widespread interpretation also shared by Hume, the Pyrrhonian programme is to bring about equipollence in all matters such that "total suspence" and tranquillity can be achieved.

To understand Hume's criticism of the Pyrrhonian method, let us explore in more detail what the three notions involved in the *Pyrrhonian Transition* might mean in a modern context in terms of mental states and acts as well as the relations between them. What are the mental entities described as equipollence (isostheneia), suspension of judgement (epoché), and tranquillity (ataraxia)? How are they psychologically and normatively related? Is there any activity on the part of the agent, or is this simply a causal chain of events? To this end, it will be helpful to consider the metaphor about the painter Apelles, which Sextus introduces to explain the fortuitous outcome of the transition:

> They say that he [Apelles] was painting a horse and **wanted to represent** in his picture the lather on the horse's mouth; but he was so **unsuccessful** that **he gave up**, took the sponge on which he had been wiping off the colours from his brush, and flung it at the picture. And when it hit the picture, **it produced** a representation of the horse's lather.
>
> (PH I.28)

Apelles aimed to represent a horse with a foamy mouth. He tried to do so by painting with his brush. That didn't quite work out; the foam must have been unrealistic, so he figured the painting was ruined. In frustration he abandoned his method (of painting with a brush) and pitched his sponge at the depiction. We can interpret the action of throwing the sponge as expressive of his retreat as a painter. Surprisingly, this desperate act of receding was exactly what enabled Apelles to reach his ultimate goal: a realistic representation of a horse with foam at its mouth.

Sextus thought that the transition from equipollence to tranquillity by way of suspension—as observed by the future Pyrrhonian Sceptics—is analogous to what happened to Apelles:

> Now the Sceptics were hoping to acquire tranquillity **by deciding** the anomalies in what appears and is thought of, and **being unable** to do this **they suspended judgement**. But when they suspended judgement [abandoning the aim of deciding what is true and false], **tranquillity followed** as it were fortuitously, **as a shadow follows a body**.
>
> (PH I.29, our addition in brackets)

Equipollence is a state of "dispute" where all sides of the dispute (including arguments and appearances) are perceived by the subject as having equal strength. It is important to note that equipollence incapacitates the subject from deciding about what is true, due to the subject's apprehension that all arguments for and against are equally convincing. In other words, equipollence is a state of mind where subjects find equal evidential support for all possible answers to the target question. Being in this state is experienced by the subject as troubling and disturbing. Hence, the ultimate aim of the inquiring subject is to close this troubling question, as this will provide relief and tranquillity. Initially, the future Pyrrhonians thought that deciding what is true and what is false—that is, *answering* the question—would be the only method by which closure could be attained. But as luck would have it, suspending judgement provides an alternative way of closing the question and thus attaining tranquillity, without supplying an answer.

Suspension of judgement can be seen as a mental act of retreat in reaction to the apprehension that one is unable to decide or answer the question at hand. In the analogy, throwing the sponge is a physical action that represents or expresses Apelles' scrapping of brush-painting, the method he initially considered to be suitable for depicting the lather. Likewise, the future Pyrrhonians gave up on answering the question, which they originally thought was the only way to rid their minds of it. In both cases, the retreat with respect to the intermediate aim surprisingly led to success with respect to the ultimate aim. Apelles found that the flung sponge, as if by chance, produced an exact depiction of the horse's lather on the painting; and the future Pyrrhonians found themselves freed from the question after giving up their aim of finding the correct answer. Hence, giving up on answering the question on the grounds of equally balanced evidence can function as a *conclusion* of one's inquiry. That is what Sextus means when writes that the "Sceptical persuasion" is called "suspensive, from the feeling that comes about in the inquirer after the investigation" (PH I.7). It is plausible to think that the "standstill of the intellect, owing to which

we neither reject nor posit anything" (PH I.10) is the effect of ceasing to inquire into truth and falsity in this sense.[5]

If equipollence is characterized as a state of doxastic puzzlement or indecision with respect to a question, and suspension of judgement consists in abandoning the aim of answering the question in response to the recognition of an equipollent dispute, then what is tranquillity? It seems that tranquillity is *not* a specific doxastic state but rather a property of another mental state. Sextus describes it as "freedom from disturbance or calmness of soul" (PH I.10). This quality of calmness may be ascribed globally, a calm state of mind with respect to everything, or more locally to mental states that are individuated by their content, e.g., calm attitudes towards propositions or questions. Unlike suspension, tranquillity is explicitly characterized as something *passive*, something that occurs together with something else: suspension is followed by tranquillity "as a shadow follows a body." Likewise, the depiction of the horse's lather was *produced* by the sponge Apelles hurled. Hence, by suspending, one's initially puzzled and disturbed condition is *automatically* settled and put at ease. In this sense, the transition from equipollence to tranquillity may be seen as a qualification of the initially *disturbing* state of indecision such that it is transformed into a *settled* and calm state of indecision. Tranquillity thus can be seen as a calm, settled version of the initial equipollent dispute, brought about by the suspension of judgement.

Making sense of the *Pyrrhonian Transition* isn't easy. The tricky questions concern the nature and rationality of suspension of judgement. Is suspension a *state of mind*? Or is it a *mental act*? Does it follow *automatically* from an equipollent dispute, or does the dispute merely provide a *reason* for the subject to suspend? Does suspension depend on the *will*? Can it? Can there be equipollence *without* subsequent suspension? According to Sextus, suspension results from something called "Sceptical persuasion," which is the insight that the arguments on all sides are equally convincing. In introducing the Pyrrhonian modes, which are methodological tools designed to facilitate equipollence by revealing contradictions and uncertainties, Sextus employs various formulations to describe how suspension is brought about: for some modes, it is only "*likely*" (PH I.134) that suspension will follow, whereas for other modes, subjects "*conclude* to suspension of judgement" (PH I.35). Stronger formulations contend that subjects are "*forced* to suspend" (PH I.128) or "*must* suspend" (PH I.140), and sometimes, it is "absolutely *necessary* for us to suspend" (PH I.177). Other formulations are explicitly normative and present the insight into the equipollent situation as a *reason* to suspend: "we *conclude* that, since everything is relative, we *shall* suspend judgement" (PH I.135).

Given these descriptions, suspension of judgement seems to be something that is done or should be done on the part of the subject if

the circumstances are of the equipollent kind. Of course, Sextus does not want to assert anything about the dynamics between the equipollent circumstances and the suspension that follows (or is supposed to follow); as a Pyrrhonian, he merely describes what the different modes appear to bring about or are observed to achieve. But even if we will not find a definite answer regarding the psychological details and normative role of suspension in Sextus' work, it is interesting that he vacillates, on the one hand, between descriptive and normative formulations, and on the other hand, between more active and more passive ascriptions of suspension. As will become clear, these are the two questions that interpretations of Pyrrhonism, interpretations of Hume's critique of Pyrrhonism, and contemporary characterizations of suspension of judgement are all divided about. Our ultimate task is to find out which notions of suspending judgement, if any, are compatible with Hume's epistemology and which of them Hume adopted in his meta-discussion of philosophical inquiry.

3.4 Hume's Critique of Pyrrhonism

3.4.1 Richard Popkin's Pyrrhonist Interpretation of Hume

Richard Popkin (1951) argues that Hume's acceptance of Pyrrhonian Scepticism is centred on the idea that there is no rational or certain basis for our judgements across various domains, including factual, moral, and mathematical matters. This scepticism leads to the conclusion that we must suspend judgement on any proposition. However, nature compels us to act and form beliefs, even in the absence of rational justification. This natural compulsion prevents us from completely suspending judgement, especially in everyday affairs where instinct and habit drive our beliefs and actions. As Hume notes, "the ordinary wisdom of nature [will] secure so necessary an act of the mind, by some instinct or mechanical tendency, which ... may be independent of all the laboured deductions of the understanding" (EHU 5.22, SBN 55).

In acknowledging both the lack of a rational foundation and the necessity of instinctive belief, Popkin (1951) positions Hume as both a "perfect" or "complete" and a "schizophrenic Pyrrhonist" with a "split personality" (p. 407). According to Popkin, only the Humean Pyrrhonist "has any hope for quietude" (p. 405) because they are not dogmatic about their scepticism and do not attempt to suspend judgement on everything. Humean Pyrrhonists gain ease of mind by accepting that fighting against our natural instincts is both dogmatic and futile. In contrast, orthodox Pyrrhonists "will not attain peace of mind, and instead will go mad" (p. 405) because of their constant battle with nature.

What does this interpretation of Hume tell us about the notion of suspension of judgement? How should we understand the proposed separation between the rational evidence for suspension and its psychological basis? Popkin argues that Hume pragmatically accepts that our doxastic attitudes, including suspension of judgement, are constrained by our psychological nature.

> If we live according to nature, we then suspend judgment only when it is natural to do so, and, as Hume contended, it is not natural to do so solely because we lack rational evidence for coming to a decision.
>
> (Popkin 1951, p. 404)

But under which circumstances is it *natural* to suspend, if not on the basis of the evidence one appreciates? It is helpful to review Hume's conclusions about our belief in causation. Hume suggested that due to "a kind of instinct or natural impulse" (THN 1.4.2.51, SBN 214), we believe, without rational foundation, that there is such a principle that binds together cause and effect; however, he is also clear that the *nature* of this principle cannot and should not be speculated about. Translated into suspension talk, one could say that while we should but cannot suspend regarding the existence of causation, we *should* and *can* suspend judgement about its exact nature. Before we discuss this difference, let us be clear about the two ways of understanding "cannot suspend" in the case of our belief in a causal principle. On the one hand, it could mean that we cannot suspend judgement *at all*; on the other hand, it could mean that we can suspend judgement while engaged in philosophical inquiry but *cannot maintain* the suspensive attitude for long. Hume seems to opt for the latter:

> As long as our attention is bent upon the subject, the philosophical and study'd principle may prevail; but the moment we relax our thoughts, nature will display herself, and draw us back to our former opinion.
>
> (THN 1.4.2.51, SBN 214)

Hume thought that the rational grounds for suspension, even if acknowledged by the subject in theoretical reasoning, are insufficient for successfully maintaining it in real life.

We could think of a distinction between "sceptical suspension" which applies only during philosophical reasoning and sceptical doubt, and "natural suspension," which is the kind of attitude that endures the challenges of common affairs. The following analysis of Hume's take on suspension by Popkin (1951) may be read as distinguishing between natural and sceptical suspension. Moreover, it can be understood as providing an argument against metacognitivist theories of suspension as introduced in Section 3.2.

Just *having* rational grounds for suspending in theory does not make it so in real life:

> Nature leads us to this suspensive attitude when the dogmatist's arguments go too far away from the affairs of common life. On the other hand, nature does not lead us to a suspensive attitude on many unfounded beliefs about the common affairs of mankind. It is really only on the basis of a psychological investigation that one can determine when, in actual life, we do suspend judgement. This cannot be discovered merely by investigating the grounds of our opinions.
>
> (p. 404)

In light of this distinction between natural and sceptical suspension, we may think of the Humean Pyrrhonian as persuading us to suspend judgement during sceptical reflection, while only some of those suspensive attitudes will hold up in real life. Hume was transparent about his sceptical conclusions having an expiration date when taking it for granted that "whatever may be the reader's opinion at this present moment, that an hour hence he will be persuaded there is both an external and internal world" (THN 1.4.2.57, SBN 218). This would also mean that, in general, we are psychologically able to suspend judgement based on what we think is rational, which would in turn explain why we are impressed by sceptical arguments in the first place, even if the sceptical attitude will typically not withstand real life. We may suspend judgement about the existence of a principle of cause and effect, but we will revert to belief in the moment we are back in the real world and must live our lives. This is a good thing according to Hume:

> But a Pyrrhonian cannot expect, that his philosophy will have any constant influence on the mind: Or if it had, that its influence would be beneficial to society. On the contrary, he must acknowledge, if he will acknowledge anything, that all human life must perish, were his principles universally and steadily to prevail.
>
> (EHU 12.25, SBN 162)

However, the suspensive attitude regarding the specific nature of the causal principle seems to be a different matter for Hume. With respect to "enquiry beyond the appearances of objects to the senses," Hume contends "that most of our *conclusions* will be full of scepticism and uncertainty" (THN 1.2.5.26n12, SBN 638–9). Throughout the first *Enquiry* and the *Treatise* he points at limitations and boundaries of human reasoning that cannot and should not be exceeded even in philosophical inquiry. He talks about a "final decision upon the whole" about questions he takes to be "absolutely

unintelligible" (THN 1.4.5.33, SBN 250) and recommends to "stop" or "terminate" inquiry in such cases:

> At this point, it would be very allowable for us to stop our philosophical researches. In most questions, we can never make a single step farther; and in all questions, we must terminate here at last, after our most restless and curious enquiries.
>
> (EHU 5.9–10, SBN 47)

It seems to us that Hume does indeed recommend suspending judgement in the natural and real-life sense regarding questions about the nature of causation and other topics that exceed our abilities. Here, philosophical reasoning does indeed have an impact on real life:

> Another species of *mitigated* scepticism, which may be of advantage to mankind, and which may be the natural result of the Pyrrhonian doubts and scruples, is the limitation of our enquiries to such subjects as are best adapted to the narrow capacity of human understanding.
>
> (EHU 12.25, SBN 162)

It seems that there is a beneficial and a non-beneficial kind of suspension, and both occur in Hume's philosophy. When Hume recommends suspending on whether there *is* a causal principle that binds together cause and effect, he is aware that this suspensive attitude can only be of a sceptical kind, because the natural instinct to believe in causation is too strong and necessary for us to continue with our lives. This latter form of suspension fits well with Hume's ambivalent relation to Pyrrhonism. On the one hand, he admitted that Pyrrhonian principles are "difficult, if not impossible, to refute" (EHU 12.21, SBN 158–9) and that "a Pyrrhonian may throw himself or others into a momentary amazement and confusion by his profound reasonings" (EHU 12.23, SBN 159–60); on the other hand, Hume thought that "the first and most trivial event in life will put to flight all his [the Pyrrhonian's] doubts and scruples" (EHU 12.23, SBN 159–60).

In this picture provided by Popkin's interpretation, suspension of judgement is effortful and can be achieved through thorough inquiry. Whether the attitude prevails in real life is a matter not dependent on us. Yet, this seems not to be a feature of suspension alone. The same can be true for other doxastic attitudes, which are also constrained by normative and psychological circumstances. However, in this interpretation, it is not clear what the nature of the suspensive attitude amounts to. Is it really more than the *absence* of belief and disbelief about a question one is inquiring into? On the one hand, Hume refers to his sceptical insight into the nature of causation as an extraordinary "conclusion" which speaks for a settled

state. On the other hand, the characterization of "momentary amazement and confusion" does not seem to be a stance at all.[6] Possibly, the distinction between "sceptical suspension" and "natural suspension," as introduced on the basis of Popkin's interpretation, might be better captured in terms of unsettled indecision or equipollence for the former and stable agnostic neutrality for the latter. This would explain the *Pyrrhonian Transition* as outlined in Section 3.3, where the unsettled state of equipollence must be distinguished from the settled state of indecision as two different ways of being neutral. The disparity of their nature with respect to settledness would explain why the latter but not the former survives in real life. In the next section, we will take a closer look at the possibility of a settled state of neutrality in Hume's epistemology.

3.4.2 Louis Loeb's Stability-Based Interpretation

Louis Loeb (2002) described Hume as sharing the Pyrrhonian aim for tranquillity but rejecting the technique they use to get there. He introduced two objections from Hume against the Pyrrhonian technique. On the one hand, Hume thought that it is plainly false for some beliefs that we could ever suspend judgement on them, even if we are confronted with solid counterarguments. As we have seen in the previous section, Hume thought that nature will force some beliefs upon us. On the other hand, and more importantly for Loeb's interpretation, Hume is presented as having rejected the *Pyrrhonian Transition* on the grounds of psychological implausibility. While Hume agreed with the Pyrrhonian aim of achieving tranquillity as something desirable, he did not think that a calm state of mind can ever be achieved by equipollence and suspension of judgement, or so Loeb argued.

Loeb introduced the *Pyrrhonian Transition* as involving three states that "lead" to one another: equipollence leads to epoché, which leads to tranquillity. He agrees with our characterization of the *Pyrrhonian Transition* that the "skeptic gave up achieving quietude by aiming for true belief" (p. 7). However, Loeb seems not to agree that this vindication is the relevant suspensive act which settles the state of equipollence such that it becomes calm. Apparently, Loeb did not distinguish the three stages of the *Pyrrhonian Transition* with respect to the quality of their respective settledness. In Loeb's (2002) version of the *Pyrrhonian Transition*, equipollence must account for tranquillity even *before* suspension takes place:

> The underlying idea is that the presence of equipollent, opposing arguments constitutes an equilibrium, a settled condition, so that, other things being equal, sustained suspension of judgment and the felt tranquillity that derives from it are possible. It is because it constitutes a settled condition that *isostheneia* can lead to *epoché*, and in turn to

> *ataraxia*. These latter states—suspense of judgment and tranquillity—themselves require a settled condition which, for Sextus, is ultimately the contribution of the equipollence of opposing arguments.
>
> (pp. 7–8)

If Hume shared this picture of the *Pyrrhonian Transition*—that "equipollence of opposing arguments constitutes a settled condition" (Loeb, 2002, p. 7)—then he must have rejected the idea that tranquillity can ever be attained on the basis of suspending judgement. The textual evidence from Hume that Loeb provides in support of his claim is compelling. When discussing the existence of external things, Hume describes the psychological struggle, the uneasiness, and the mental disruption that is caused by equally convincing arguments on both sides that can only be escaped by believing the fiction of a double existence:

> This philosophical system, therefore, is the monstrous offspring of two principles, which are contrary to each other, which are both at once embrac'd by the mind, and which are **unable mutually to destroy each other**. ... Nature is obstinate, and will not quit the field, however strongly attack'd by reason; and at the same time reason is so clear in the point, that there is no possibility of disguising her. Not being able to reconcile these two enemies, we endeavour to set ourselves at ease as much as possible, by successively granting to each whatever it demands ... 'Tis therefore from the intermediate situation of the mind, that this opinion arises, and from such an adherence to these two contrary principles, as makes us seek some pretext to justify our receiving both; which happily at last is found in the system of a double existence.
>
> (THN 1.4.2.52, SBN 214–6)

Hume is giving us psychological evidence that clearly and convincingly contradicts the claim that "equipollence of opposing arguments constitutes a settled condition" (Loeb, 2002, p. 7). However, one may question whether this is a correct depiction of the Pyrrhonian idea of equipollence. Sextus does *not* say that equipollence as such is a state of tranquillity; rather, it is also called "equipollent dispute," which provides the grounds for suspension to take place. Once judgement has been suspended (and not before), tranquillity follows automatically: "*because* of the equipollence in the opposed objects and accounts, we come *first* to suspension of judgement and *afterwards* to tranquillity" (PH I.8).

Naturally, equipollence is the pertinent place to intervene for the Pyrrhonians to challenge their interlocutors' beliefs. Suspension can occur only if there are equally convincing arguments on all sides, and this is the only stage of the transition where the Pyrrhonian can step in. Equipollence

is presumably an unsettling state if one hopes to find the right answer. Yet, if one abandons this aim and endorses one's own de facto indecision as appropriate in the equipollent circumstances, one settles one's own indecision—or so we want to argue (see Wagner, 2022). This is the settling effect that the suspensive act provides by putting an end to inquiry.

Employing Hume's terminology, this kind of suspension could be described as setting oneself at ease or finding relief from nagging, unanswerable questions. We think that Hume did exactly that in other instances—in his discussion of the concept of belief, for instance, and the nature of causation. We saw this in Section 3.1 when discussing Popkin's "natural suspension," which was grounded either in the lack of evidence or in positive evidence regarding human limitations. Against Loeb (2002), we want to argue that Hume's epistemology leaves room for cases of suspending judgement on the basis of *contradicting evidence* as would be found in a state of equipollence. In his discussion of miracles, for example, Hume characterizes a wise person as proportioning their doxastic state to the evidence which may consist of "opposite experiments" (EHU 10.4, SBN 110–1) leading to "proof against proof" (EHU 10.11, SBN 114). Loeb is correct that the equipollent state regarding the continuity and identity of external things is not a case that can be calmed through suspension, because there will be constant battle and combat between the competing arguments. We'd like to point out, however, that this situation is a *special case*. Regarding the continuity and identity of external things, philosophical inquiry provides us with the insight that we have contradictory beliefs that are both irresistible. The presence of irresistible beliefs, however, is not a necessary feature of equipollence as such. In other contexts, Hume allows for opposing arguments that destroy each other and balance out:

> But when the fact attested is such a one as has seldom fallen under our observation, here is a contest of two opposite experiences; of which the one destroys the other, as far as its force goes, and the superior can only operate on the mind by the force, which remains [which might be zero].
> (EHU 10.8, SBN 113, our addition in brackets)

Let us provide a case where the remaining force of two opposing experiences is zero. Take two equally convincing witness reports about some matter of fact, such as whether a specific person stole the last apple from a tree in a private garden. One witness clearly identified Catherine as the culprit, whereas the other attested that the thief was not a woman. If both reports are equally credible, it is equally conceivable that Catherine did or did not steal the apple. If there is no further evidence, one will be at a loss and unable to answer the question since there is proof against proof. In this case, the witness reports cancel each other out, and one can settle on

indecision by stopping one's questioning thoughts. There are no irresistible beliefs involved that would constitute an insurmountable disruption and continued struggle between equally strong opponents such that a fiction like a double existence would be required to find (momentary) peace. Thus, we conclude that Hume does not in principle rule out cases where subjects who find themselves in the state of equipollence can settle their indecision by suspending judgement. This is so because not all cases of equipollence are the "monstrous offspring" of irresistible beliefs that contradict each other and are held at the same time. Loeb's argument must be restricted to those special cases where we are not only at a loss to find the answer to a question we cannot resolve but also cannot renounce the aim of finding out which of the two irresistible beliefs should be given priority.

Loeb (2002) uses the formulation "suspension of belief" instead of "suspension of judgment." This is not accidental. What Loeb seems to have in mind is the Pyrrhonians' technique of challenging individual beliefs held by their dogmatic interlocutors with the aim of making them suspend their beliefs. In the next section, the distinction between suspension of one's belief and suspension of judgement will play a crucial role. We'll argue that these are two different operations of the mind.

3.4.3 David Norton on Suspension of Belief

David Norton (1982) diagnosed Hume with a "distorted view of Pyrrhonism" (pp. 266–7) for which "he supposed (incorrectly) the Pyrrhonians comprehended all forms of belief under the heading of assent, assertion, or judgment, and that they thought all beliefs could be suspended" (p. 269). For the latter part, Norton takes Hume's concept of belief to be crucial in rejecting the *Pyrrhonian Transition*:

> Hume does think that we can alter what we assent to or believe, and even cause ourselves to assent pro and contra alternatively, but he does not think that these are matters within the immediate or direct control of the will, or that by an act of will we can achieve suspension of belief.
>
> (Norton 1982, p. 269)

> Consequently, the Pyrrhonians are in his eyes a 'fantastic sect' not only because of what they tell us to disbelieve ... but also because they tell us what we ought to disbelieve when in fact belief is not an activity that we can suspend or engage in at will.
>
> (ibid.)

Note that Norton uses the term "disbelief" in a sense that deviates from its use in contemporary epistemology, where disbelieving a proposition is

usually seen as equivalent to believing its negation. For example, a subject who disbelieves that it is raining believes that it is not raining.[7] This is not what Norton wants to say about the Pyrrhonians because they would take believing the negation of something to be just as dogmatic as believing the non-negated proposition. What Norton must mean here is dis-believing in the sense of *reversing* the acquisition of a belief: giving up a belief one has adopted at some earlier point and thus "un-doing" the acquisition of the belief in some sense. He must be thinking of the transition from belief to non-belief.

For example, a scientist who stayed in a lab without windows for two days comes to believe that it is raining outside after her colleague entered her lab completely soaked. However, after talking to her colleague, she finds out that he did not leave the building for the last two days either and only had an accident with a broken water pipe in his lab, which is somewhere else in the windowless building. On the basis of this information, she discards her belief that it is raining outside. It is essential to understand that while she withdraws her belief that it is raining outside, she does not adopt an alternative belief, e.g., the belief that it is not raining outside. She has no evidence that would support this claim or its negation: neither she nor her colleague had any contact with the world outside the lab and so neither of them has any indication about whether or not it is raining. After the revision, she is in a state of non-belief as to whether or not it is raining.[8] When Norton talks about "disbelief," we assume it is this operation of belief-withdrawal that he has in mind.

Norton takes the "suspension of a belief" to be the same as *dis*-believing in the sense just described: suspending a belief is nothing but withdrawing a belief. Contrary to Norton, we want to argue that this is not the relevant act of suspension—not the act that accounts for the Pyrrhonian epoché. It is a distinct operation of the mind, according to us. To establish that "suspension of a belief" and "suspension of judgement" (epoché) are two distinct suspensive operations of the mind, we will show that belief-suspension and epoché are to be located at different stages of the *Pyrrhonian Transition*. To locate the transition from belief to non-belief (suspension of a belief), we must look at what happened *before* the state of equipollence was attained. The Pyrrhonians' daily business is to challenge their interlocutors' dogmatic beliefs by providing arguments that undermine them. This is what their modes are supposed to help them with. The goal is to make the dogmatists understand that they have no rational basis for the individual beliefs they hold. If the arguments provided by the Pyrrhonians are good enough, the dogmatists will drop their beliefs and end up in the state of equipollence. Norton is correct that this transition cannot be an act of will if it is supposed to fit into Hume's conception of belief. However, there is no indication that Sextus thought of the "Sceptical

persuasion" as something depending on the will. The Pyrrhonian challenge is all about providing arguments which *naturally* lead to a change of mind, at least if we can assume a minimal responsiveness to arguments, which Sextus clearly did. This should cause no trouble for Hume's conception of belief either:

> We may, therefore, conclude, that belief consists merely in a certain feeling or sentiment; in something, that depends not on the will, but must arise from certain determinate causes and principles, of which we are not masters. When we are convinc'd of any matter of fact, we do nothing but conceive it, along with a certain feeling, different from what attends the mere *reveries* of the imagination. **And when we express our incredulity concerning any fact, we mean, that the arguments for the fact produce not that feeling.**
>
> (THN App.2, SBN 623–4)

In Hume's words, the transition from belief to equipollence through the work of new arguments against the proposition believed can be described as a causal process of gradually weakening the characteristic feeling that accompanies belief until it has faded out completely. There is no act of will required because we are not "masters" of the causal power of a compelling argument. Of course, we may question the actual force of the Pyrrhonian arguments, particularly the modes they put forward, but this is another question. *If* the arguments provided are compelling, Hume would agree that one will lose one's belief in a natural process that does not require any acts of will.[9]

Suspension of judgement in the sense of epoché, however, is a different operation of the mind and occurs at a later stage of the *Pyrrhonian Transition*. Whereas equipollence is the *result* of the suspension of a belief, suspension of judgement in the sense of epoché is only possible if the subject is already in a state of equipollence. Here, an act of the will is more plausible because what is suspended now is not a belief or any doxastic attitude that we have no voluntary control over. It is rather the suspension of inquiry, which, by and large, is under our voluntary control. Suspending judgement is the relevant act or event that makes the subject stop pursuing the aim of finding the correct answer to the target question. Suspending is giving up this aim and should be unproblematic for Hume. Hume talks about the act of stopping and starting inquiry as "allowable" and "pardonable" as can be seen here, even if it is rationally restricted:

> At this point, it would be very allowable for us to stop our philosophical researches. In most questions, we can never make a single step farther;

> and in all questions, we must terminate here at last, after our most restless and curious enquiries. But still our curiosity will be pardonable, perhaps commendable, if it carry us on to still farther researches, and make us examine more accurately the nature of this *belief*, and of the *customary conjunction*, whence it is derived.
>
> (EHU 5.9–10, SBN 47)

Inquiry can be more or less fruitful depending on the topic and the subject's resources for finding the answer, and it may be more or less "commendable" to inquire into certain topics. However, by and large, it is in our power to start and stop inquiry at will, even if we are sometimes haunted by questions that we can only avoid by distractions. What we want to stress in our opposition to Norton (1982) is that even if Hume is not explicit about using the suspension of inquiry as the relevant act or event that characterizes the suspension of judgement in the Pyrrhonian sense of epoché, such a view is compatible with his concept of involuntary belief. This is an unproblematic act of will because, by suspending inquiry within the *Pyrrhonian Transition*, there is no change from one *type* of doxastic state—a belief, let's say—to another type of doxastic state, e.g., non-belief. Rather, there is a transition from an unsettled, neutral state of mind (equipollence) to a calm or tranquil neutral state of mind. Recall that tranquillity is not a specific doxastic state but only a *property* or feature of another state, which is here the state of indecision (or equipollence). Someone who suspends judgement in this sense is undecided about the answer to the target question before *and* after the suspensive act but changes from an unsettled or disturbed state of indecision to a settled or committed one. One could also say that mere indecision is a neutral state of mind that marks the *absence* of an opinion, whereas settled indecision constitutes the mind-set of a *neutral opinion*.

In summary, since subjects do not adopt or drop beliefs in the *Pyrrhonian Transition* from equipollence to tranquillity, there is no conflict with Hume's concept of involuntary belief. This reading contrasts with Norton's. However, Norton (1982, p. 279) seems to agree with our interpretation of inquiry as a voluntary activity for Hume along a different dimension. Norton introduces a distinction between "being in doubt" as a disposition or *mental state* and "doubting" as an *activity*. He takes Hume's concept of belief to be compatible with the activity of doubting as something that depends on the will just as we think that Hume's concept of belief is compatible with starting and stopping inquiry. We take it that inquiry is a broader and more general activity that includes the activity of doubting as described by Norton.

3.5 Conclusion: Hume's Meta-Discussion of Philosophical Inquiry

To understand Hume's view on suspension of judgement as a doxastic attitude, we reviewed his critique of Pyrrhonian Scepticism and discussed interpretations of this critique provided by Popkin (1951), Norton (1982), and Loeb (2002). Against the backdrop of contemporary epistemological debates on suspension of judgement, we explained how various forms of neutrality fit into Hume's psychologically informed epistemology. Using the *Pyrrhonian Transition* from equipollence to tranquillity through the act of suspension, we discussed the distinction between mere indecision (equipollence) and settled indecision (a calm neutral state). To settle their indecision on a tough question, the Pyrrhonians would characteristically abandon the aim of finding an answer (this is suspension of judgement or epoché). Building on Popkin's (1951) interpretation of Hume as the only true Pyrrhonist, we suggested that Hume distinguished between unstable and stable forms of neutrality that reflect the psychological constraints imposed on us by nature in the form of irresistible beliefs.

Discussing Loeb's (2002) stability centred view of Hume, we noted that the settling act of suspending judgement is compatible with Hume's description of equipollence as an unsettled condition, at least for cases that do not include equally strong irresistible beliefs on both sides. Against Norton (1982), we argued that Hume's conception of involuntary belief is compatible with suspension (epoché) being an act of will because the act merely qualifies the doxastic state of indecision but does not change its type. Moreover, we suggested that the act of suspending judgement is distinct from the operation involved in belief-suspension or belief-withdrawal. In contrast to suspending judgement (epoché), the suspension of a belief is not a settling act but the retraction of an existing belief in response to undermining evidence. While belief-suspension results in a state of indecision, suspension of judgement (or judging) has mere indecision as its starting point. Finally, we drew a parallel between Norton's (1982) activity of doubting and the more general activity of inquiry, both of which can be controlled by the will and are central to Hume's philosophy.

Hume's meta-discussion of philosophical inquiry aligns well with contemporary debates about norms of inquiry and the zetetic turn in epistemology (Friedman, 2020; Thorstad, forthcoming). The zetetic turn in epistemology asks about the rationality of inquiry (*zetesis*). Are there any specific norms of inquiry? Are zetetic norms epistemic or practical, or maybe both? What are the psychological constraints and bounds of inquiry? Clearly, the overarching question is *how to inquire well*. According to Hume, a good inquirer is someone who, amongst other things, masters

the various forms of suspension. To characterize a "just reasoner," Hume identified different forms of neutrality and suspension as they are discussed in the contemporary debate. But he did this without explicating their distinct roles in inquiry. Let us close with some examples.

First, Hume's thoughts about the inquiry-closing kind of suspension, which takes centre stage in the *Pyrrhonian Transition*, may be characterized as a recommendation not to engage in fruitless speculation:

1 **Be curious but know your limits**. Find the right point to accept your ignorance and suspend inquiry at this point.

> If we carry our enquiry beyond the appearances of objects to the senses, I am afraid, that most of our conclusions will be full of scepticism and uncertainty. ... I must acknowledge, that I find no very decisive arguments on either side. ... Nothing is more suitable to that philosophy, than a modest scepticism to a certain degree, and a fair **confession of ignorance** in subjects, that exceed all human capacity.
>
> (THN 1.2.5.26n12, SBN 638–9)

Second, in the contemporary debate, there is another kind of suspension which is sometimes dubbed "inquiry-maintaining suspension," "withholding judgement," or "precautionary suspension" (McGrath, 2021a b; Wagner, forthcoming). With this kind of suspension subjects do not settle their neutrality but maintain it until further evidence is available. The inquiry-maintaining kind of suspension is characteristic of a cautious and open-minded inquirer who does not seize upon simple answers to complex questions. Hume's second recommendation could be framed as follows:

2 **Don't jump to conclusions** and avoid premature opinions.

> In general, there is a degree of doubt, and **caution**, and modesty, which, in all kinds of scrutiny and decision, ought for ever to accompany a just reasoner.
>
> (EHU 12.24, SBN 161–2)

> That princess received him with a more easy, if not a more gracious countenance; and heard his apology, without discovering any visible symptoms of indignation. She then told him, that ... **she had hitherto suspended her judgment, till farther and more certain information should be brought her**.
>
> (HE 40.67)

Finally, Hume recognized that while sceptical doubts about reason and the senses are inevitable and recurring like a virus, they should not dominate one's existence. He suggested finding distractions in real life to manage these doubts. This is not suspension of judgement, obviously, but it could be seen as the suspension of doubt brought about by distracting activities:

3 Do not let philosophical doubts dominate your life.

> This sceptical doubt, both with respect to reason and the senses, is a **malady**, which can **never be radically cur'd**, but must return upon us every moment, however we **may chace it away**, and sometimes may seem entirely free from it.
>
> (THN 1.4.2.57, SBN 218)

This happens at the APA and other philosophical burlesques: the logic choppers raise doubts as they squabble with each other over nothing. Instead of getting fuddled and upset, try suspending uncertainty by departing. A state of tranquillity may follow.

Notes

1 A notable exception is Zinke (2021) who takes suspension to be constituted by the absence of belief and disbelief while holding fixed the same preconditions as for belief and disbelief.
2 Other epistemologists who agree on the *sui generis* view of suspension include Archer (2024), del Rio (2024), Lord and Sylvan (2021), and Staffel (2019).
3 For more problems with metacognitivist accounts see Archer (2024), del Rio (2024), Ferrari and Incurvati (2022), Rosa (2021), Wagner (2021, 2022), and Zinke (2021).
4 We will restrict our discussion here to "matters of opinion" and put aside the "moderation of feeling in matters forced upon us" (PH I.25).
5 How can we explain that Sextus characterizes the (Pyrrhonian) Sceptics as the branch of philosophy that is "still investigating," (PH I.2) in contrast to the Dogmatists and the Academics? Norton (1982, p. 264) suggests that this aspect of Pyrrhonian Scepticism is inconsistent with the Pyrrhonian aim for tranquillity. We prefer an alternative explanation: Academic Sceptics reached the general conclusion about the unattainability of truth and knowledge, leading to a cessation of inquiry into individual matters, whereas the Pyrrhonians continue to investigate into *individual* matters on a case-by-case basis before suspending judgement. Moreover, the Pyrrhonians engage in inquiry whenever they want to *challenge* the Dogmatists' individual beliefs about reality by finding opposing arguments. In this sense, the Pyrrhonians continue to inquire (for the sake of finding counterbalancing arguments to present to their interlocutors) once the Dogmatist has closed inquiry through the adoption of an answer.

6 Humes seems to treat "amazement" and "suspence" as synonyms: "Reason here seems to be thrown into a kind of *amazement and suspence*, which, without the suggestions of any sceptic, gives her a diffidence of herself, and of the ground on which she treads" (EHU 12.18, SBN 156–7).
7 The equivalence can be doubted. See Smart (2020) who takes disbelief to be a distinct doxastic attitude that is not the same as believing the negation of the target proposition. Still, this reading is not the one that Norton (1982) uses to address the Pyrrhonians.
8 For a detailed analysis of the operation of suspending one's belief in the formal framework of belief revision, see Rott (forthcoming).
9 As we have seen in previous sections, it can still happen that in the "moment we relax our thoughts, nature will display herself, and draw us back to our former opinion" (THN 1.4.2.51, SBN 214): for example, when the to-be-dropped belief is irresistible. In other cases, the resulting non-belief may be permanent.

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Part III

Reason and Reasons

4 The Priority of Passive Reasoning

Jonathan Cottrell

4.1 Introduction

What is *inference* or *reasoning*? For starters, we might say: reasoning is a mental process that begins from some propositional attitude(s) we already have and leads us to form a new attitude or to revise our earlier attitudes, e.g., by giving some of them up, or changing our basis for them, or altering the degree of commitment with which we hold them, or—in the limiting case—leaving them as they were. And this would be true, as far as it goes. But it doesn't go far enough. For reasoning is not the only process that fits this description. Self-deception, wishful thinking, indoctrination, association, and no doubt other processes besides, can also lead us from old attitudes to new ones. We'd like to know what's distinctive of reasoning: what sets it apart from other processes by which we acquire or revise attitudes?

This question has risen to prominence in recent epistemology and philosophy of mind, thanks largely to influential publications by John Broome (*Rationality through Reasoning*, 2013) and Paul Boghossian ("What is inference?", 2014). Several other philosophers have since weighed in. Much remains controversial among them. Live issues include whether reasoning essentially involves "taking" one's premises to support one's conclusion; whether it essentially involves rule-following; and whether it essentially involves higher-order thought. However, one point is widely agreed: reasoning—or, at least, the philosophically most important kind of reasoning—is a form of mental *activity*. Broome (2013, 208) proposes to investigate "*active* reasoning, or reasoning as an activity, by which I mean reasoning that we do"; he adds that "[s]ome automatic processes that happen in us might be classified as passive reasoning, but I am not interested in those" (see also Broome 2014, 23–24). Similarly Boghossian (2014, 2) sets aside reasoning that is "sub-personal, sub-conscious, [and] involuntary" and focuses instead on a kind of reasoning that is "a person-level, conscious, voluntary mental action"; he argues that this kind of

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reasoning is epistemologically more important than the passive processes sometimes called "reasoning" (Boghossian 2018, 59–61). And other philosophers who've since joined the debate have often inherited Broome and Boghossian's view that reasoning (of the philosophically interesting kind) is active.[1]

The question "what is reasoning?" also occupied Hume. But as I'll try to show here, he approached it quite differently. In his famous discussions of induction, he argues that *passive* inductive reasoning has a kind of priority over active reasoning: our warrant for passive reasoning is the source of our warrant for active reasoning. Hume therefore regards passive reasoning as the philosophically more important kind, and focuses on developing an account of passive reasoning, rather than active.

Here, I aim to present Hume's view in a sympathetic way, as a contribution to the current debate. I'll start by presenting Boghossian's argument that the philosophically most important kind of reasoning is a form of mental activity, and by explaining his and Broome's accounts of what makes reasoning active (Section 4.2). I'll then turn to Hume's contribution. I'll explain the distinction between active and passive kinds of reasoning, as he sees it (Section 4.3); and I'll extract from his works an argument that passive reasoning has a kind of epistemic priority over active reasoning (Section 4.4). Lastly, I'll try to show that Hume can answer Boghossian's argument for the philosophically greater importance of active reasoning (Section 4.5).

4.2 Reasoning as Mental Activity

When giving a philosophical account of reasoning, why suppose that the phenomenon to be explained is a kind of mental *activity*? Boghossian (2018, 59–61) gives the following argument. Reasoning interests epistemologists only insofar as it has these three properties:

(Basing) When you infer from P to C, you *establish* the premises P as *your reason* for believing the conclusion C, you establish them as the *basis* on which you believe C.
(Quality) Given this basing fact, your belief can be assessed as resting on good or bad reasons.
(Responsibility) And given this fact, too, you can be held *responsible* for having reasoned well or badly. The quality of your reasoning will enter into an assessment of your rationality.

Boghossian argues that a mental process has these properties only if it's a "goal-directed mental action in which the thinker takes herself to be trying to figure out what she has reason to believe" (2018, 68). In particular,

a process must be a mental action in order to have the Responsibility property:

> [F]or it to make sense to hold you responsible for your inferences, inferring has to be something you *do*, and not just something that happens to you. It has to be a mental *action* of yours, something you have control over, and which you could have done differently, had you thought it desirable to do so.
>
> (2018, 60)

This argument purports to show that, insofar as reasoning or inference is epistemologically interesting, it's a form of mental activity—"something you *do*, and not just something that happens to you". Boghossian sees a close relation between this *active* character of reasoning and a further condition that he imposes on reasoning or inferring:

(Taking Condition) Inferring from P to C necessarily involves the thinker *taking* P to support C and drawing C *because* of that fact [*sc.*, the fact that she so takes them].[2]

Boghossian traces the Taking Condition back to Frege (1979, 3). In the twentieth century, Judith Jarvis Thomson (1964) and Barry Stroud (1979) advocated versions of it.[3] According to Boghossian (2019, 113), the Taking Condition explains the active or "agential" character of reasoning: the Taking Condition "is one clear way" to make reasoning "count as agential". Since "no other ways appear obviously available", and since reasoning is a form of mental activity (as argued above), we should accept the Taking Condition.[4]

John Broome (2013, 208) shares Boghossian's focus on "active reasoning, or reasoning as an activity, by which I mean reasoning that we do". He contrasts "active reasoning" with "automatic processes" that cause us to satisfy rational requirements (Broome 2013, 208). He acknowledges that some of these automatic processes "might be classed as passive reasoning", but says, "I am not interested in those" (2013, 208). He proceeds to develop an account only of active reasoning.

Unlike Boghossian, Broome does not explain or justify this focus. Perhaps he thinks that "automatic processes", and hence "passive reasoning", are topics for the experimental psychologist rather than the philosopher. If so, then Hume will take him to be wrong about this.

Like Boghossian (2018), Broome wishes to explain the active character of reasoning—what "makes" it an activity (Broome 2013, 235–242). His account differs from the one that Boghossian now favours. (But see Boghossian 2014 for an account more like Broome's.) According to

Broome, reasoning is active because it involves *rule-following*: in reasoning, we follow a rule for operating on the contents of our attitudes (Broome 2013, 231–232)—for example, the *modus ponens* rule "from *p* and (if *p*, then *q*) to derive *q*" (2013, 232).[5]

Why does Broome think that rule-following suffices for activity or agency? The answer is at least partly that rule-following involves the thinker's proceeding in a way that "seems right" to her, and in doing so gives the process a kind of personal endorsement, which contributes to explaining its active or agential character: "A process's seeming right to you is a sort of personal endorsement from you. This is part of what makes the process yours: something you do" (Broome 2013, 238).

For Broome, then, there's a close relation between the active character of reasoning and the following condition on reasoning or inferring:

(Rule-Following Condition) Inferring from P to C necessarily involves the thinker's following an inference rule that permits moving from P to C.

Let's now turn from these contemporary views to Hume's. We'll see that, in his view, some cases of reasoning satisfy Boghossian's Taking Condition and Broome's Rule-Following Condition. However, there's a kind of reasoning—one that Hume considers theoretically important—that satisfies neither condition. So, Hume cannot accept either taking or rule-following as a necessary condition for reasoning.

4.3 Hume on Active and Passive Reasoning

The contemporary theories that we've considered aim to characterize a genus, *reasoning*, that encompasses both deductive and inductive reasoning. Hume focuses on inductive reasoning, partly because of its importance for action—we rely on beliefs about the unobserved, in particular about the future, whenever we plan or act—and partly because he thinks that his Early Modern predecessors had neglected it, in favour of "demonstrative" reasoning. Here, I'll follow Hume and focus on inductive reasoning.

In his *Treatise of Human Nature*, Hume may at first appear to accept the now-widespread view that reasoning is a form of mental activity. When introducing this topic, he writes that "all kinds of reasoning" involve some "action of the mind", in contrast with sensation, which is "passive" (T 1.3.2.2/73).[6] However, this appearance turns out to be misleading. Later in his discussion, he distinguishes two kinds of inductive reasoning, which I'll call *unreflective* and *reflective*.[7] We'll see that, while reflective reasoning is plausibly active, the unreflective kind is not.

Let's start with *unreflective* reasoning. One of Hume's main claims about induction is that *some* inductive reasoning is an habitual, associative transition from premise(s) to conclusion, deriving from a mental "mechanism" or "instinct" that he calls "custom", which we share with other animal species (T 1.3.6.12/92, T 1.3.8.10/102–103, T 1.3.16.8–9/178–179; E 5.5–6/43–45, 9.5/106–107). After experience of a regular succession whereby one type of event—say, the rising of some smoke—is always accompanied by another—say, the burning of a fire—when we next experience a token of one type, we habitually expect there to be a token of the other, before we experience it, and indeed whether we experience it or not: "When we are accustom'd to see two impressions conjoin'd together, the appearance or idea of the one immediately carries us to the idea of the other" (T 1.3.8.12/102–103). When Hume says that this movement of thought takes place "immediately", he means (at least in part) that it involves no mediation by other mental states (in his terminology, "perceptions", i.e., "impressions" or "ideas"):

> [W]e may exert our reason without employing more than two ideas [sc., corresponding to the premise and the conclusion], and without having recourse to a third to serve as a medium betwixt them. We infer a cause immediately from its effect; and this inference is not only a true species of reasoning, but the strongest of all others, and more convincing than when we interpose another idea to connect the two extremes.
>
> (T 1.3.7.5n/97n)

When I now see smoke rising, I form a belief that there's a fire. Other than my visual impression of the smoke (which Hume considers a kind of belief)[8] and my belief in the fire, no other mental state is involved in this process. It seems to follow that unreflective reasoning does not satisfy Boghossian's Taking Condition: in order to do so, it would have to involve a further mental state, i.e., a state of "taking" my premise (that smoke is rising) to support my conclusion (that there's a fire). Notice that, in the same breath as saying that some inductive processes involve no such mental state, Hume also insists that these processes are "a true species of reasoning". So, he seems to reject Boghossian's view that the Taking Condition is necessary for a mental process' counting as a piece of reasoning.

In Hume's view, my smoke-to-fire inference is caused partly by my past experience of a conjunction between the types *smoke* and *fire*. However, insofar as this inference is *unreflective*, I need not recall this past experience or use any general principle that links it with the present tokens of smoke and fire:

> The custom operates before we have time for reflection. The objects [in this case, smoke and fire] seem so inseparable, that we interpose not a moment's delay in passing from the one to the other. … This removes any pretext, if there yet remains any, for asserting that the mind is convinc'd by reasoning of that principle, *that instances of which we have no experience, must necessarily resemble those, of which we have*. For we here find, that the understanding or imagination can draw inferences from past experience, without reflecting on it; much more without forming any principle concerning it, or reasoning upon that principle.
>
> (T 1.3.8.13/104)

It seems to follow that unreflective induction does not satisfy Broome's Rule-Following Condition, either: in order to do so, it would involve "reasoning upon" a general "principle", namely, the rule that one is following. Since Hume insists that this mental process is nevertheless "a true species of reasoning", he must also reject Broome's view that the Rule-Following Condition is necessary (indeed, essential) for a mental process' counting as a piece of reasoning.[9]

Perhaps unsurprisingly, then, Hume also holds that unreflective inductive reasoning is not a form of mental activity, but a passive mental process. In the *Treatise*, he calls it "a species of sensation" (T 1.3.8.12/103), which he has previously described as "passive" (T 1.3.2.2/73).[10] Similarly, in the *Enquiry*, he says that such reasoning derives from an "instinct or mechanical tendency" (E 5.22/55) that we share with other animals (E 9.5/106–107), and thereby implicitly likens it to our "faith in the senses", which is also due to "a natural instinct or prepossession" that we share with "the animal creation" (E 12.7/151).

For Hume, not all inductive reasonings are instances of unreflective, customary association. Our abilities to reflect upon our past experience, and upon our own mental lives, make more sophisticated kinds of reasoning available to us (T 1.3.8.14/104–105, 1.3.13.11/149). For example, we can reflect "on the nature of our understanding, and on our experience of its operations in the judgments we form concerning objects", i.e., on past cases of inductive reasoning (T 1.3.13.11/149). By means of this reflection, we can discover "general rules, by which we ought to regulate our judgment concerning causes and effects" (T 1.3.13.11/149). Hume's idea seems to be that we consider the patterns of reasoning that we've used in the past and observe which patterns have been most successful in producing true conclusions. By reasoning inductively from this past experience, we conclude that the same patterns will continue to produce true conclusions in future reasoning. Thereafter, we regard these patterns as rules to which our future reasoning "ought to" conform (T 1.3.13.11/

149); and we "employ" these rules "in [our] reasoning" (T 1.3.15.11/175). So, at least some cases of *reflective* inductive reasoning satisfy Broome's Rule-Following Condition. (On cases of inductive reasoning that involve following or "conduct[ing] ourselves" by "maxim[s]" or "rule[s]", see also E 10.16/117.)

Hume also seems to hold that at least some cases of reflective inductive reasoning satisfy a condition in the spirit of Boghossian's Taking Condition. He says that in "reasonings concerning fact", i.e., inductive reasonings,

> it is constantly supposed, that there is a connexion between the present fact and that which is inferred from it. Were there nothing to bind them together, the inference would be entirely precarious. The hearing of an articulate voice and rational discourse in the dark assures us of the presence of some person: Why? because these are the effects of the human make and fabric, and closely connected with it.
>
> (E 4.4/26–27)

The kind of reasoning described here involves "suppos[ing]" a relation between the fact(s) represented by one's premise(s) and that represented by one's conclusion. Because one's transition from premise(s) to conclusion is mediated by this supposition, it is not "precarious"—that is, not just a guess or a stab in the dark. So, this supposition plays a role akin to that of "taking" in contemporary accounts that posit a Taking Condition on reasoning: for example, in Thomson's (1964) account of reasoning, the role of "taking" is, precisely, to differentiate reasoning from merely guessing.

On the face of it, Hume's "supposition" differs from Boghossian's "taking" state, in that Hume's "supposition" involves representing a causal relation rather than a relation of support. However, this difference may be less than meets the eye. Plausibly, Hume appeals to causation because he considers it the inductive counterpart of entailment: in a good piece of deductive reasoning, the premises are related to the conclusion by logical necessity (entailment); analogously, in a good piece of inductive reasoning, the premises are related to the conclusion by natural necessity (causation). Insofar as entailment is a necessary part of deductive support,[11] so too—in Hume's view, at least—is causation a necessary part of inductive support.

In Boghossian's view, if a mental process satisfies the Taking Condition, it's active. In Broome's view, the same goes for the Rule-Following Condition. So by their lights, at least some cases of Humean reflective reasoning—those that meet these conditions—are cases of mental activity and thereby differ from the passive, unreflective kind of inductive reasoning.

So, Hume holds that there are two kinds of inductive reasoning: unreflective and reflective. Psychologically, they differ significantly: reflective

reasoning is a non-associative process that is mediated by mental representations of rules or other principles of reasoning, or by a "taking" state; unreflective reasoning is a customary, associative process that involves no such mediation. Some philosophers—Boghossian is certainly one of them—would say, on these grounds, that unreflective reasoning does not deserve to be classified, together with reflective reasoning, as a genuine kind of reasoning. Why does Hume disagree? Why does unreflective reasoning count as a genuine kind of reasoning, in his view?

In recent literature, Hilary Kornblith (2012, Ch. 2) defends a view akin to Hume's, on which some reasoning is unreflective (Kornblith is particularly concerned to show that some reasoning involves no "higher-order thought", i.e., thought about thought). Like Hume, Kornblith is motivated partly by a desire to understand reasoning as common to humans and non-human animals. Suppose we put our question to Kornblith: why does unreflective reasoning count as a genuine kind of reasoning? His answer seems to be that it's a process of thought that involves mental states causally interacting in virtue of their contents (Kornblith 2012, 55).

But this answer is unsatisfactory—both by Hume's lights and in fact. All associative processes involve mental states causally interacting in virtue of their contents, but not all associative processes are cases of reasoning. For example, Hume holds that some processes involved in generating our everyday belief in external bodies are associative (T 1.4.2.31–40/201–208), but he denies that they are instances of reasoning (T 1.4.2.14/193). So, Kornblith has not identified a feature that is common to reflective and unreflective reasoning *and* that sets them apart from other, non-reasoning processes.[12]

I think Hume has a better answer to offer: what unites the two kinds of reasoning, and sets them apart from other mental processes, is that they have a common *end* or *goal*. In his essay "The Sceptic", the narrator—a fictional character, but one who closely resembles Hume—characterizes reasoning in terms of what the reasoner "endeavour[s]" to achieve by it:

> In the operation of reasoning, the mind does nothing but run over its objects, as they are supposed to stand in reality, without adding any thing to them, or diminishing any thing from them. If I examine the PTOLOMAIC and COPERNICAN systems, I endeavour only, by my enquiries, to know the real situation of the planets; that is in other words, I endeavour to give them, in my conception, the same relations, that they bear towards each other in the heavens.
>
> (Sc 13/164)

Here, the narrator seems to be characterizing *reflective* reasoning: in his example, the reasoner has a goal before her mind, namely, the achievement

of knowledge or true belief (the narrator equivocates as to which); presumably, in her pursuit of this end, she adopts means—methods of belief-formation[13]—that she supposes will help her to achieve it and forms beliefs according to these methods. However, Hume elsewhere suggests that *unreflective* reasoning also has the goal of producing true belief. In this case, the reasoner need not have the goal before her mind; indeed, she need not mentally represent it at all. Instead, her customary, associative reasoning has the goal of reliably producing true belief as its *natural function*: nature has, as it were, designed the mental mechanism at work for the purpose of reliably producing true beliefs about the unobserved.[14] Hume suggests this view when he describes the mechanism responsible for unreflective inductive reasoning as "a kind of pre-established harmony between the course of nature and the succession of our ideas" (E 5.21/54) which is "essential to the subsistence of human creatures" and which "nature", in its "wisdom", has "secure[d] … to some instinct or mechanical tendency, which may be infallible in its operations"—an "instinct, which carries forward the thought in a correspondent course to that which [nature] has established among external objects" (E 5.22/55). Elsewhere, he characterizes reason in terms of its distinctive "offices" or functions, among them the production of true belief ("discover[ing] objects, as they really stand in nature", M App1.21/294). On this view, a reasoner need not think about the production of true belief in order to count as reasoning, any more than a cordate must think about the circulation of the blood in order to count as having a heartbeat. This aspect of Hume's view explains why he can say that dogs and horses can reason, despite their presumably having no thoughts about true belief (E 9).

I therefore surmise that, for Hume, reasoning in general is a type of process that aims to produce true belief. In some cases, this goal is mentally represented by the reasoner, and she deliberately adopts means—"maxims", "rules", or "methods" of belief-formation—that she believes will conduce to her achieving it. These are cases of *reflective* reasoning, which is a form of mental activity. In other cases, the goal is not mentally represented by the reasoner, and she does not deliberately adopt means of pursuing it. Nevertheless, her mental process has the natural function of reliably producing true beliefs. Hence, the process aims at this goal, in the same sense that the beating of one's heart aims at circulating one's blood. These are cases of *unreflective* reasoning, which is passive, like sensation, and hence not a form of mental activity.

But—even supposing we agree that a coherent conception of reasoning *can* be defined in Hume's way—why should we be interested in *this* conception of reasoning? Why not restrict our attention to a narrower conception of reasoning, which includes only *active* mental processes, as Boghossian and Broome recommend? I'll now channel Hume, in order to

argue that unreflective, passive inductive reasoning has a kind of epistemic priority over its reflective, active sibling.

4.4 The Priority of Passive Reasoning

In Hume's view, both unreflective (hence, passive) and reflective (hence, active) inductive inferences can be warranted. However, there's an asymmetry between them: warrant for reflective reasoning *derives from* warrant for unreflective, passive reasoning. So, passive inductive reasoning is *epistemically prior to* active. The priority of passive reasoning explains and justifies Hume's choice to make it the focus of his psychological and epistemological theories of induction.

Why should we accept that passive inductive reasoning enjoys this kind of epistemic priority over active? I believe that Hume's famous "Sceptical Doubts" and "Sceptical Solution" provide an answer. To be clear, I don't think that the argument I'll draw from them is the only legitimate reading of these sections. In fact, my focus on the active/passive distinction is somewhat orthogonal to Hume's purposes there. However, when read through contemporary eyes—and particularly from the perspective of recent debates about reasoning—these sections of the *Enquiry* strongly suggest the following argument; and, whether or not it's the argument Hume meant to give there, I believe that he would accept each of its premises.

Hume's "Sceptical Doubts" concern the "foundation" of our "reasonings concerning matter of fact", that is, inductive reasonings (E 4.4/26–27). By "foundation", Hume means *a source of warrant*.[15] He raises questions about the "foundations" of both beliefs and inferences, but in "Sceptical Doubts" he focuses primarily on the source of warrant for *inferences*: he wants to know what warrants us in *moving* from our premises to our conclusion in the case of inductive reasoning: his question is what (if anything) "support[s]" us in "tak[ing]" the "step" from premises to conclusion (E 5.2/41; for discussion of the "foundation[s]" of beliefs, see E 5.7/45–46 and compare T 1.3.4.2/83).

More specifically, Hume's "Sceptical Doubts" concern the source of our warrant for *reflective*, and hence *active*, inductive reasonings. See how he introduces his topic:

> All reasonings concerning matter of fact seem to be founded on the relation of *Cause and Effect*. By means of that relation alone we can go beyond the evidence of our memory and senses. If you were to ask a man, why he believes any matter of fact, which is absent; for instance, that his friend is in the country, or in FRANCE; he would give you a reason; and this reason would be some other fact; as a letter received from him, or the knowledge of his former resolutions and promises.

> A man, finding a watch or any other machine in a desart island, would conclude, that there had once been men in that island. All our reasonings concerning fact are of the same nature. And here it is constantly supposed, that there is a connexion between the present fact and that which is inferred from it. Were there nothing to bind them together, the inference would be entirely precarious.
>
> (E 4.4/26–27)

Here in the set-up of his sceptical argument, Hume does not focus on the unreflective, passive kind of inductive reasoning. Instead, he focuses on a case where the reasoner can go some way towards justifying his conclusion by citing his premises—say, the fact that there's a watch on this island—and by citing a "connexion" that he supposes to hold between his premises and his conclusion. This reasoner is reflective and active: he thinks about his premises and conclusion, and about the connection between them, and makes the transition from premises to conclusion because he supposes them connected.

Hume goes on to ask about the "foundation" of this supposition: that is, what warrants us in "suppos[ing]" or taking our premises and conclusion to be connected—a question that arises only in the case of reflective, active inductive reasoning. He argues that if this supposition is warranted, then its warrant derives partly from experience of a "constant conjunction" between some type of thing represented by our premise and the type represented by our conclusion (E 4.5–13/27–32). He then argues that we are warranted in extending this past conjunction to a new case only on the basis of a further "supposition" (E 4.19/35): namely, "that the future will resemble the past" (E 4.21/37; see also E 4.19/35) or, more broadly, "that the objects, of which we have no experience, resemble those, of which we have" (E 10.16/117). This part of Hume's argument brings it into close contact with the contemporary views about reasoning that we've examined.

So far, Hume has argued that, *when it is reflective and active*, inductive reasoning depends, for its warrant, on a "supposition": that the future or, more broadly, the unobserved, resembles the past, or the observed. He now tends to characterize this "supposition" in two different ways. Sometimes, he characterizes it as a *descriptive proposition* that the reasoner *believes* or *assumes*, which functions either as a premise in the reasoning or as a background assumption that makes warranted inference possible: the proposition "that the future will be conformable to the past" (E 4.19/35), which is "the sum [i.e., conjunction] of all our experimental conclusions" (E 4.20/36). At other times, he characterizes it as a *rule* that the reasoner *follows* in moving from premises to conclusion: for example, he describes the reasoner as taking the past as "a rule for the future" (E 4.21/38) and

says that "we commonly conduct ourselves in our reasonings" by "[t]he maxim" or "rule" "that the objects, of which we have no experience, resemble those, of which we have" (E 10.16/117). Henceforth, let's call the rule of extrapolating observed regularities onto the unobserved *the inductive rule*.

Why should Hume thus equivocate about the nature of the crucial "supposition"? I surmise that he has the following line of thought in mind. He holds that a *reflective* reasoner follows the inductive rule: the "maxim" of resemblance between the observed and the unobserved. Hence the passages where he seems to characterize the "supposition" as a "rule" or "maxim".[16] The reflective reasoner is warranted in taking the step from premises to conclusion only if she's warranted in following this rule. We've seen that a reflective reasoner has an aim in mind: namely, to form a true belief about the matter she's investigating. She reasons as a means to achieving this end. So, her following of a particular rule is warranted only if she's warranted in believing that following this rule is the best available means to this end: it has at least some prospect of leading her to a true belief, and no other way of proceeding has a better prospect of doing so. Hence the passages where Hume seems to characterize the "supposition" as a descriptive proposition, e.g., the proposition *that the unobserved will resemble the observed*. This proposition formulates the condition under which the inductive rule is likely to lead us from true premises to true conclusions. If the unobserved *will, in fact*, resemble the observed—per the descriptive proposition—then the rule of extrapolating observed regularities onto new, as-yet unobserved cases will, likely, lead us from true premises to true conclusions. Or, at least, it has some prospect of doing so. And no other way of proceeding has a better one.

Hume ultimately wants to know whether a reasoner is warranted in following the inductive rule. He proposes that, in order to be, she must first be warranted in believing this descriptive proposition and thereby warranted in believing that the inductive rule is the best available means to the end of forming a true belief about the matter of fact in question.[17] The crux of his "Sceptical Doubts" is that no source *other than passive inductive reasoning* can provide warrant for believing this descriptive proposition. The content of this belief—that the future will resemble the past—is a matter of fact. So, it cannot be warranted by intuition (which is available only in the case of self-evident relations of ideas) or by demonstration (that is, the *a priori* proof of a non-self-evident relation of ideas). Moreover, this matter of fact outstrips the deliverances of our senses and memory. So, our belief is warranted—if at all—only on the basis of inductive reasoning. But it cannot be warranted via *reflective* inductive reasoning. For every piece of reflective inductive reasoning involves following the very rule whose

warrant is now in question, and Hume denies that rule-circular reasoning can confer warrant (E 4.19/35–36).

What follows? If all warranted inductive reasoning is reflective reasoning—that is, an active, reflective process that involves using an inference rule as a means to the end of believing truth—then no piece of inductive reasoning is warranted. The consequent of this conditional is an extreme form of inductive scepticism. Rather than accept it, Hume rejects the antecedent. If we could not acquire the belief that the future will resemble the past via a warranted piece of *unreflective, passive* inductive reasoning, then none of our reflective, active inductive reasoning would be warranted. Active inductive reasoning inherits its warrant from some previous piece of passive inductive reasoning. In this way, passive inductive reasoning is epistemically prior to active inductive reasoning.

This argument assumes that active inductive reasoning involves rule-following. What if active inductive reasoning involves "taking" one's premises to support one's conclusion, but not following a rule? That is, what if Boghossian's Taking Condition *is* necessary for active reasoning, but Broome's Rule-Following Condition *is not*?[18] A similar argument can be constructed. The key premises will be: a piece of active reasoning is warranted only if the reasoner is warranted in taking her premises to support her conclusion; and she's warranted in so taking them only if she's first warranted in believing that the future will resemble the past. Hume can then argue much as before that, on pain of circularity, the taking-states involved in active inductive reasoning must derive their warrant from some previous piece of passive inductive reasoning.[19]

Of course, these arguments raise the question of how *passive* inductive reasoning is warranted. Hume's "Sceptical Solution" suggests several accounts of the warrant of customary, unreflective, and hence passive inductive reasoning. He suggests that it's warranted in virtue of its *utility*; in virtue of the *unavoidability* of the customary mechanism that produces it; in virtue of custom's *reliability*; and in virtue of custom's having a *natural function* that it *performs well*, when it produces passive inductive inferences. My own view—which I defend at length elsewhere—is that the last point best captures Hume's view and allows us to make sense of the others.[20] Custom's natural function is reliably to stock our minds with true beliefs about ordinary objects in as-yet unobserved, but nearby, regions of space and time. A piece of passive inductive reasoning is warranted just in case it's an example of custom performing this function well. However, any plausible reading of Hume's "Sceptical Solution" will agree with me on the following point: customary, unreflective, passive inductive reasoning does not involve the reasoner's following a rule or taking her premises to support her conclusion; so, no question arises here of our warrant for following a rule, or for a taking-state; and, in particular, we need not be

warranted in believing that the future will resemble the past *at the time of* drawing a passive inductive inference—unlike in the case of *active* inductive reasoning.

The argument I've extracted from Hume's "Sceptical Doubts" and "Sceptical Solution" focuses on our warrant for *inferences* or *pieces of reasoning*—as Hume puts it, for a "step taken by the mind" (E 5.2/41)—rather than our warrant for *beliefs formed via reasoning*. However, the argument makes an assumption about our warrant for such beliefs: namely, that a belief formed via reasoning is warranted by that piece of reasoning only if the reasoner is *first* warranted in drawing the inference. In other words, warrant for drawing an inference is *epistemically prior to* inferential warrant for believing its conclusion.[21] I can't point to direct textual evidence that Hume accepts this assumption. But I think this assumption, or one much like it, is needed to disallow rule-circular warrant, which Hume wishes to do (E 4.19/35–36).[22]

To summarize and tighten up these observations, I've extracted the following argument from Hume's texts. I'll focus here on the rule-following version of the argument, but—again—Hume could give a parallel argument focused on "taking":

1 Active inductive reasoning involves following an inductive inference rule.
2 When a piece of reasoning involves rule-following, it's warranted only if the reasoner is warranted in following the relevant inference rule.

So,

3 A piece of active inductive reasoning is warranted only if the reasoner is warranted in following an inductive inference rule (1, 2).
4 Given the end of reasoning, a reasoner is warranted in following an inference rule only if she's warranted in believing that it's truth-preserving, or at least somewhat likely to preserve truth.[23]
5 A reasoner is warranted in believing that an *inductive* inference rule is truth-preserving, etc., only if she's warranted in believing that the future will resemble the past.

So,

6 A reasoner is warranted in following an *inductive* inference rule only if she's warranted in believing that the future will resemble the past (4, 5).

So,

7 A piece of active inductive reasoning is warranted only if the reasoner is warranted in believing that the future will resemble the past (3, 6).
8 The proposition that the future will resemble the past is a matter of fact that goes beyond what we've experienced (hereinafter, an unobserved matter of fact).

9 Any warrant for believing an unobserved matter of fact derives from an antecedently warranted piece of inductive reasoning.[24]

So,

10 Any warrant for believing that the future will resemble the past derives from an antecedently warranted piece of inductive reasoning (8, 9).

So,

11 A piece of active inductive reasoning is warranted only if the reasoner first carries out another piece of warranted inductive reasoning (7, 10).

12 No infinite regress is possible here, on pain of warranted reasoning's never getting started.

13 If [a piece of active inductive reasoning is warranted only if the reasoner first carries out another piece of warranted inductive reasoning, and no infinite regress is possible here], then a piece of active inductive reasoning is warranted only if the reasoner first carries out a warranted piece of *passive* inductive reasoning.

And so,

14 A piece of active inductive reasoning is warranted only if the reasoner first carries out a warranted piece of *passive* inductive reasoning (11, 12, 13).

Therefore, the nature and warrant of passive inductive reasoning deserve the attention of epistemologists: our warrant for active inductive reasoning ultimately derives from our warrant for passive inductive reasoning.

4.5 Answering Boghossian's Argument: Basing, Quality, and Responsibility

I've presented an argument that I find in Hume, to motivate the view that epistemologists should concern themselves with the nature and warrant of *passive* reasoning. But we've seen an argument from Boghossian that reasoning is of interest to epistemologists only insofar as it's *active*. How (if at all) can Hume answer this argument?

Recall that, according to Boghossian, reasoning is of epistemological interest only insofar as it has the following three properties and has these properties only if it's a form of mental activity:

(Basing) When you infer from P to C, you *establish* the premises P as *your reason* for believing the conclusion C, you establish them as the *basis* on which you believe C.

(Quality) Given this basing fact, your belief can be assessed as resting on good or bad reasons.

(Responsibility) And given this fact, too, you can be held *responsible* for having reasoned well or badly. The quality of your reasoning will enter into an assessment of your rationality.

There are two ways of answering this argument. First, Hume might deny that reasoning is of epistemological interest only if it has all three of these properties. Second, he might argue that *passive* reasoning *has* all three of these properties. I think that Hume can give this second reply.

On the picture I find in Hume, passive reasoning is an operation of a mental faculty whose function is reliably to produce true beliefs as output, given true beliefs as input. A piece of passive reasoning is warranted just in case, and because, it's an example of this faculty functioning well. And a belief is inferentially warranted just in case, and because, it's produced by a warranted inference from input-beliefs that are themselves warranted. I'll consider each of the properties to which Boghossian appeals—Basing, Quality, and Responsibility—and I'll argue that, by Hume's lights, *passive* reasoning has all three of them. So, Boghossian's argument fails to show that reasoning is of epistemological interest only insofar as it's *active*.

4.5.1 Basing

It's notoriously hard to say what epistemic basing is. However, one common proposal appeals to non-deviant causal relations:[25] *p* is one's basis for believing *q* only if one has a belief that *p* (or, on some accounts, has another suitable type of mental state with the content that *p*),[26] and one's having this belief (or other state) non-deviantly causes one to believe that *q*. In the case of passive reasoning from *p* to *q*, this condition is met. Such reasoning is a causal process that takes a belief, memory, or impression that *p* as input[27] and produces a belief that *q* as its output. Specifying "non-deviance" is no mean feat, and I won't attempt it here. But when a belief is produced by the normal working of a mental faculty whose function is reliably to produce true belief, it seems that the causal relation between input- and output-states should count as non-deviant. And the production of belief by Humean passive reasoning meets this condition.

Further, when *p* is your basis for believing *q*, your belief that *q* owes its epistemic good-standing to your belief that (or other attitude towards) *p*: insofar as the former belief is warranted, it owes this warrant to the latter. Again, in the case of passive reasoning from *p* to *q*, this condition is met. On the Humean picture I've sketched, a belief is inferentially warranted just in case, and because, it's produced by a warranted inference from input-beliefs that are themselves warranted. So, when one reasons passively from *p* to *q*, and thereby comes to believe *q*, one's belief that *q* owes its warrant to one's belief that *p*.

I don't insist that the two conditions mentioned here—non-deviant causation and inheritance of warrant—are individually necessary or jointly sufficient for basing. However, the view that they *are* has at least some initial plausibility. Also, this view is suggested by Hume's texts: I take it that his use of "foundation" and "founded on" expresses (at least) something akin to the basing relation so conceived. So, it's plausible that, on this Humean view of basing, passive induction has the Basing property that Boghossian sees as necessary for genuine reasoning. If an opponent of Hume wants to argue otherwise, the burden is on them to explain why Hume's conception of basing is unsatisfactory.

4.5.2 Quality

When someone forms a belief via passive reasoning, can it be assessed as resting on good or bad reasons? Certainly, on the view I find in Hume, *the process responsible for* this belief can be assessed as a good or bad piece of reasoning. It's good when it's an example of "custom" *functioning well*, i.e., working in a way that tends to fulfil its "office" or function of reliably producing true beliefs. It's bad when it's an example of "custom" malfunctioning, perhaps due to interference from other mental causes.

What's the relation between (i) a *belief's* being assessable as resting on good or bad reasons (that is, Boghossian's Quality property) and (ii) a *belief-generating process'* being assessable as a good or bad piece of reasoning? Boghossian sometimes seems to equate the two, characterizing Quality in terms of *the reasoning process'* being assessable: for example, he says it's distinctive of reasoning—unlike mere association—that it can be "assessed as done well or done badly" (Boghossian 2018, 63; see also Boghossian 2016, 50, and 2019, 111 and 113).[28] If the two really are equivalent—or, more weakly, if the assessability of the process *suffices for* that of the resulting belief—then, in arguing that Humean passive reasoning is an assessable process, I have, in effect, already argued that it has Boghossian's Quality property, despite its passivity.

But why should we accept that the assessability of the process, as a good or bad piece of reasoning, suffices for the assessability of the belief that it produces, as resting on good or bad reasons? Simon Blackburn (2010, 6–10) provides an argument friendly to Hume. Reasons are *reasons for* something—they have a kind of relationality built into them. When we ask whether Smith's belief that *p* rests on good reasons, we're asking about the relation between her reasons and her belief: are they good reasons *for* believing *p*? To each such relation, there's a corresponding "movement of the mind": in this case, the movement *from* the reasons *to* the belief that *p*. When we ask whether Smith's reasons are good, we're asking whether this is a good movement of the mind. This view brings the question whether

a belief-forming process is assessable, and the question of whether the resulting belief is assessable, close together. If the process is assessable as a good or bad piece of reasoning, then we can express our approval of the process (supposing we approve it) by saying that Smith's belief rests on good reasons, or (supposing we disapprove it) by saying that it rests on bad reasons.

When someone forms a belief about the unobserved via Humean customary induction, her belief-forming process is assessable as a good or bad piece of reasoning, despite its passivity. Via the Blackburnian argument I've just sketched, we can infer that the resulting belief is assessable as resting on good or bad reasons. That is, we can infer that—despite its passivity—customary inductive reasoning has Boghossian's Quality property.

4.5.3 Responsibility

Lastly, when someone forms a belief via passive reasoning, can they be held responsible for having reasoned well or badly? In Hume's view, we are responsible primarily for our mental qualities—durable features of our "character and disposition"—not for our actions (T 3.2.1.2–4/477–478; E 8.29/98). We can be responsible for a mental quality even if we have acquired it involuntarily, and even if we cannot gain or lose it by any actions that we might undertake. Hume claims that some traditionally recognized virtues, including constancy, fortitude, and magnanimity, are such qualities: we are praiseworthy on account of having them, even though they are "involuntary and necessary" to those who have them (T 3.3.4.3/608). Likewise, vices such as "a passionate or splenetic temper" are "blameable" and yet "natural to", and hence unavoidable by, those who have them: indeed, the greater the degree of these vices, "the more vicious" and yet "the less voluntary" they become (T 3.3.4.3/608). Other mental qualities that Hume's contemporaries would not recognize as virtues—the "natural abilities" or "talents"—also merit praise, despite their being "almost invariable by any art or industry" (T 3.3.4.4/609). These involuntary and invariable talents include the capacities that we exercise in reasoning: "good sense and judgment" (T 3.3.4.1/607); "wisdom" (M App4.6/316), which involves "proportion[ing] [one's] belief to the evidence" (E 10.4/110–111); and "that sagacity, which leads to the discovery of truth, and preserves us from error and mistake" (M App4.11/318). So, Hume holds that we are responsible for these reasoning dispositions, even though they are not actions and cannot be acquired or lost by any course of action that we might take.

Hume holds that we are responsible for our actions only in a derivative sense: we praise or blame actions only insofar as we "consider the actions

as signs or indications of certain principles in the mind and temper"; these principles or mental qualities, not the actions, are "the ultimate object of our praise and approbation [or blame and disapprobation]" (T 3.3.4.3/608). Or, as he puts it in the *Enquiry*, actions are "criminal" only insofar as they are "proofs of criminal principles in the mind" (E 8.30/99).

Any manifestation of a disposition—not just those that are actions—can serve as a "sign" or "proof" that the disposition is present. When a vase shatters upon being struck, this event is not an action, but it's nevertheless a sign that the vase was fragile. So, in cases where a praise- or blameworthy mental quality manifests itself in mere behaviour, rather than in action, it would be in keeping with Hume's view to say that this mere behaviour is praise- or blameworthy in just the same derivative way that actions are.

Some praiseworthy mental qualities—good sense, judgement, wisdom, and sagacity—manifest themselves at least partly in good passive reasoning. (They must do so, even when they manifest themselves partly in good active reasoning: for, as I have argued, good active reasoning depends, epistemically, upon good passive reasoning.) So, good passive reasoning is a "sign" or "proof" of these praiseworthy mental qualities. In contrast, bad passive reasoning is a "sign" of folly, a blameworthy mental quality. So, such reasonings are "signs" or "proofs" of praise- or blameworthy mental qualities. We are therefore responsible—praise- or blameworthy—for such reasonings, in the same derivative sense in which we're responsible for our actions, despite the fact that these reasonings are passive.

How can Hume hold that we are responsible for mental qualities that we have no agential control over? And how can he hold that we are derivatively responsible for the mere behaviour in which these qualities manifest themselves? Hume explains responsibility in terms of our sentiments: whether a mental quality is praise- or blameworthy depends on whether we feel "the sentiment of approbation or blame" when we consider it (in a suitable way, under suitable circumstances) (E 8.35/102). In his view, these sentimental responses are indifferent to whether the person we're observing has any control over the mental qualities we're considering or the ways in which those qualities manifest themselves. We are just so built that certain mental qualities elicit certain sentimental responses in us, regardless of whether those qualities were acquired by actions over which their subject had control, and regardless of whether those qualities could be lost by any such actions: "The mind of man is so formed by nature, that, upon the appearance of certain characters, dispositions, and actions, it immediately feels the sentiment of approbation and blame" (E 8.35/102). (Strawson's [1962] famous account of responsibility, which appeals to our "reactive attitudes", is a descendant of Hume's.)

Of course, Hume's view of responsibility may be wrong. But that's a further issue. For present purposes, it's enough to show that Hume can coherently hold that we can be held responsible for having reasoned well or badly, even when the reasoning in question is passive. Perhaps making the case for the epistemic primacy of active reasoning will, ultimately, require rejecting Hume's conception of responsibility.

4.5.4 Conclusion

Often, participants in the contemporary debate about reasoning *assume* that reasoning is epistemologically interesting only insofar as it's a form of mental activity. Boghossian is distinctive, in that he *argues for* this view. But I have tried to show that Hume can answer Boghossian's argument. The properties of reasoning that mark it as philosophically interesting, in Boghossian's view—Basing, Quality, and Responsibility—are all exemplified by *passive* inductive reasoning, as Hume conceives this kind of reasoning, and as he conceives basing, the assessability of beliefs and belief-forming processes, and responsibility.

4.6 Conclusion

In the contemporary debate about reasoning, it's widely assumed that reasoning—insofar as it's of philosophical interest—must be a form of mental *activity*. Hume sees things differently. In his view, the philosophically most important kind of reasoning is induction, and the epistemologically most important kind of inductive reasoning is *passive*: it's not something that we do; rather, it's something that merely happens within us. Every piece of *active* inductive reasoning derives its warrant—assuming it has any—from some prior piece of *passive* inductive reasoning. I've presented Hume's argument for this view as sympathetically as I can, as a contribution to the contemporary debate. I've also tried to show that Hume can answer Boghossian's argument for the contrary view that reasoning is of epistemological interest only insofar as it's a form of mental activity.

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Notes

1 For example, see Wright (2014), Valaris (2017), and McHugh and Way (2018). A notable exception is Richard (2019).

2 For this formulation of Boghossian's Taking Condition, see his (2019, 110).
3 For an illuminating discussion of the Taking Condition in relation to Hume's "Sceptical Doubts" about inductive reasoning, see Stroud (1977, Ch. 3).
4 This argument is one of several that Boghossian gives in support of the Taking Condition. For a comprehensive catalogue of his various arguments, see Boghossian (2019, 110–115).
5 More fully, the relevant rules are for operating on *marked contents*; see Broome (2013, 252) for discussion. For ease of exposition, I suppress this wrinkle here.
6 I cite Hume's works as follows. "T" refers to Hume (2007a), followed by book, part, section, and paragraph numbers. "A" refers to Hume's *Abstract* of the *Treatise* in Hume (2007a), followed by paragraph numbers. References to these works are followed by the corresponding page numbers in Hume (1978), set off by a slash mark. "Sc" refers to *The Sceptic* in Hume (1985), followed by paragraph and page numbers. "E" refers to Hume (2000), followed by section and paragraph numbers. "M" refers to Hume (1999), followed by section and paragraph numbers. References to these two works are followed by the corresponding page numbers in Hume (1975), set off by a slash mark. "L" refers to Hume (1932), followed by volume and page numbers. "D" refers to Hume (2007b), followed by part and paragraph numbers, and by the corresponding page numbers in Hume (1947), set off by a slash mark.
7 For helpful discussion of this distinction in Hume, see Owen (1999, 148–149 and 168–172) and especially Loeb (MS), who sheds much light on Hume's conception of unreflective, customary reasoning by comparing it to modular processes, as conceived by Fodor (1983).
8

> [T]he belief or assent, which always attends the memory and senses, is nothing but the vivacity of those perceptions they present … To believe is in this case to feel an immediate impression of the senses, or a repetition of that impression in the memory.
>
> (T 1.3.5.7/86)

9 I thank Chuck Goldhaber for highlighting to me the importance of these passages in connection with the Taking and Rule-Following Conditions.
10 In fact, he does not limit this claim to unreflective reasoning, but extends it to "all probable [i.e., inductive] reasoning" (T 1.3.8.12/103). This is not just hyperbole. We'll see below that, in Hume's view, reflective inductive reasoning ultimately derives its warrant from unreflective reasoning, and hence from a passive, sensation-like process.
11 As Harman (1986) argues, entailment is not itself the same as deductive support: the fact that a proposition one believes, p, entails some other proposition, q, may be a reason to abandon one's belief that p, not a reason that supports one's believing q. Suppose, for example, that q is obviously absurd.
12 For this and other objections to Kornblith's conception of reasoning, see Boghossian (2016, 46–47, and 2018, 64). However, note that—unlike Hume—Boghossian seems to think that *no* associative process is a case of reasoning (Boghossian 2018, 63).

13 For "rules", "maxims", or "methods" of reasoning or belief-formation, see, for example, T 1.3.15, E 4.21/38, E 8.26/96, E 10.16/117, and D 1.10/135.
14 Cottrell (2024) provides further support for this reading. See also Craig (1987, 81), Wolterstorff (1996, 166n6), and Greenberg (2008, 728–729). For criticism of this kind of reading, see Schmitt (1992, 69–72; 2014, 111–113) and Meeker (2006, 2013, Ch. 7).
15 For a similar reading, see Millican (2002). For an alternative reading, on which "foundation" has a purely causal meaning, see Garrett (2015, 182).
16 Notice that Hume moves, in the course of his argument, *from* positing a "supposition" akin to a taking-state (E 4.4/26–27) *to* positing the following of an inference rule or "maxim" (E 4.19/35–36, 4.21/38, 10.16/117). This move is in keeping with Boghossian (2014), who argues that reasoning based on a taking-state *consists in* following an inference rule that permits the transition from premises to conclusion.
17 Why couldn't someone's following of the inductive rule be warranted in virtue of "external" factors, e.g., the rule's reliability, even though she does not believe that these factors obtain? This objection may seem to have special force against Hume, given that—as I'll argue—he accepts an "externalist" account of our warrant for *passive* inductive reasoning. But Hume would reply that, insofar as our reasoning is active, we follow inference rules as means to the end we have in view, i.e., the forming of a true belief. So, our warrant for following a rule is a special case of practical rationality, i.e., the rational selection of means to our ends. And practical rationality depends on the rationality of our beliefs about the means in question (T 2.3.3.6/415–16)—here, on the rationality of our beliefs that the future will resemble the past, and that the inductive rule is therefore reliable. Suppose Hume's opponent proposed that our following of the inductive rule is warranted independently of these beliefs, e.g., warranted merely in virtue of its reliability. By doing so, she would—in effect—concede that our following of the rule, and hence our reasoning, is *not* a form of activity. And so, far from having special force *against* Hume, this objection instead plays into his hands. I thank David James Barnett for helpful discussion.
18 It's controversial whether this combination of views is tenable. Boghossian (2014) held that reasoning based on a taking-state *consists in* following an inference rule that permits the transition from premises to conclusion. On this view, a piece of reasoning satisfies the Taking Condition only if it satisfies the Rule-Following Condition. However, Boghossian (2019, 110) seems to have changed his view: he now says that it's premature to try to characterize the nature of the "taking"-state involved in reasoning. Perhaps it will turn out that the "taking"-state does not consist in any state of rule-acceptance, or in any process of rule-following.
19 Boghossian (2018, 60, 62) suggests that the taking-states involved in reasoning have an intuitional epistemology. I believe Hume would reply that, in the case of inductive reasoning, (i) we're warranted in taking the premises to support the conclusion only if we're first warranted in believing that the future will resemble the past; (ii) that it's deeply contingent (a "matter of fact") that the

future will resemble the past; and (iii) that our intuitions cannot warrant a deeply contingent proposition; hence, (iv) in the case of inductive reasoning, intuitions alone do not suffice for our being warranted in taking our premises to support our conclusion. (For the notion of the "deeply contingent", see Evans 1979.) Boghossian's most promising lines of response, it seems to me, are on claims (i) and (iii). But I do not know whether, at the end of the day, either of those claims can credibly be denied.

20 See Cottrell (2024).

21 For the notion of *epistemic priority*, see Pryor (2000, 524–526).

22 Hume doesn't justify his proscription on rule-circular warrant in "Sceptical Doubts" itself. However, his letter to Hutcheson of January 10, 1743, is relevant. There, Hume considers Butler's view that the moral sense is normative because it approves of itself and rejects it on the following grounds: "this is nothing but an Instinct or Principle, which approves of itself upon reflection; and that is common to all of them" (L 1.19/45–48). Here, Hume anticipates the twentieth-century point that, if a rule-circular argument confers warrant, then all kinds of unacceptable inference rules are warranted, including *counterinduction* and *inference to the worst explanation*. (For discussion, see Skyrms [2000, 35–44] and Douven [2021, §3.2].) This point would explain and justify his proscription on rule-circular warrant.

23 The objection addressed in note 17 applies to this premise.

24 Here, as advertised, the argument assumes that a belief formed via reasoning is warranted by that piece of reasoning only if the reasoner is first warranted in drawing the inference.

25 For variations on this theme, see, for example, Moser (1989), Turri (2011), McCain (2012), and Ye (2020).

26 Other suitable mental states might include, for example, perceptual states or quasi-perceptual states of intellectual intuition.

27 Hume regards sensory impressions and memories as kinds of beliefs (T 1.3.4.2/83). I therefore take it that they may have propositional content, or whatever kind of truth-apt content a Humean belief has.

28 In this dialectical context, it's tendentious to describe reasoning as "*done* well" or "*done* badly" (emphasis mine). The claim that reasoning has the Quality property is meant to be a *premise* in an argument for the *conclusion* that reasoning is active. Someone who doesn't yet accept this conclusion won't accept the premise that reasoning can be assessed as "done" well or badly. For she doesn't yet accept that reasoning is active and hence doesn't yet accept that it's something "done" by the reasoner. I therefore speak of a process's being assessable "as a good or bad piece of reasoning".

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5 In Search of Hume's Anti-Rationalism

Karl Schafer

> It may seem a very extravagant attempt of the sceptics to destroy reason by argument and ratiocination; yet is this the grand scope of all their enquiries and disputes.
>
> (EU 12.17)

Below I want to explore one of the most familiar aspects of Hume's philosophy: namely, his opposition to various forms of rationalism in philosophy.[1] Contrary to the traditional way of framing this issue, I will argue that many of the most radical and interesting aspects of Hume's opposition to "rationalism" relate less to the cognitive questions that there are the focus of the standard picture of early modern philosophy as a battle between empiricists and rationalists, and more to normative, meta-normative, and (indeed) meta-philosophical claims about the proper role of the faculty of reason (and the concept of that faculty) at the foundations of ethics and epistemology. More precisely, I will argue that much of Hume's philosophy can be seen as attacking the philosophical significance of the faculty of reason in both an explanatory and a normative context.

This, in turn, will raise a further puzzle – namely, why Hume does not go further in advocating for the sort of meta-philosophical anti-rationalism that would give up the use of concepts like REASON in philosophy. In response, I'll argue that Hume's continuing use of such concepts illustrates something significant about the "conceptual ethics" that is implicit in his philosophical project. This, in turn, will provide a further illustration of a larger theme in my recent work on Hume – namely, the importance of Hume's conception of the conventional "artificial virtues" for the foundations of his project.[2]

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5.1 Hume's Anti-Rationalism: Beyond the Rationalist/ Empiricist Divide

If we follow the narrative most of us learned as undergrads, the nature of Hume's opposition to rationalism might seem relatively clear. In the traditional picture of early modern philosophy as a protracted struggle between "rationalists" and "empiricists", Hume generally figures as the "arch-empiricist": the philosopher most skeptical of the claims that philosophers like Descartes, Spinoza, and Leibniz make about our capacity to know the world using reason or the intellect.[3] On this way of telling the story, Hume's anti-rationalism consists primarily in his opposition to a set of cognitive claims, which are taken to form the core of "early modern rationalism":

> **Cognitive Rationalism:** Human beings possess a robust faculty of reason or the intellect that is capable of very significant cognitive achievements – providing us with cognition of the fundamental nature of reality, morality, and God.[4]

I don't want to deny that this way of viewing things captures something significant about Hume's philosophical context and how he viewed his project within it. Nonetheless, this traditional narrative often distorts the real fault lines within early modern philosophy.[5]

For example, in his opposition to "rationalism", Hume is often criticizing "canonical empiricists" like Locke every bit as much as "canonical rationalists". And, on other points, Hume is closer to "canonical rationalists" like Malebranche than he is to many others in the traditional "empiricist" camp. Moreover, although Hume does have a more modest conception of what we can discover through the use of reason than the "canonical rationalists", there are important respects in which Hume's conception of reason as a faculty remains continuous with that in figures like Descartes or Spinoza.[6] For neither of Hume's main definitions of reason as (i) the faculty for inference or (ii) the faculty for the "discovery of truth and falsehood" would have raised many eyebrows among a Cartesian audience.

And, at least if we focus on the nature of demonstrative reasoning, Hume's conception of what these definitions *mean* would also (in many respects) be agreeable to many "canonical rationalists".[7] After all, for Hume, demonstrative reasoning involves perceiving "relations between ideas" by connecting together "intuitions" in which we immediately perceive such relations.[8] And, like Descartes, Hume conceives of this process

in "non-formal" terms. That is, the correctness of a piece of demonstrative reasoning cannot, for Hume, be captured in terms of (say) the logical form of its elements. In this, Hume is again closer to Descartes or Spinoza than he is to Kant or many medieval philosophers – who did conceive of reasoning in more formal terms.[9]

That having been said, Hume's conception of reason does differ from the "canonical rationalists" in a variety of respects. Perhaps the most obvious is Hume's denial that reason is supplied with a stock of innate ideas in the manner that is true of the Cartesian intellect. But more significant for Hume is his account of the *other* main form of inference that he attributes to reason – probable or causal inference. Here Hume plainly does conceive of many of the operations of reason in ways that tend to undermine the place "canonical rationalists" assigned to reason among our mental faculties. For by treating many of the operations of reason as (effectively) forms of association in the imagination, Hume's account of probable reasoning calls into question how most early modern philosophers (on *both* sides of the rationalist/empiricist divide) conceived of the distinctive explanatory role of reason.

As we'll see, this raises important questions about Hume's own conception of reason. For when described in this way, Hume's view of reason might seem be a sort of "monstrous hybrid" of two conceptions – fusing together a rather traditional, if modest, conception of demonstrative reason *and* a quite radical picture of probable or causal reasoning. But for the moment, I want to simply note that once again Hume's targets on this point do not line up neatly along "rationalist" vs. "empiricist" lines. Indeed, Hume's treatment of certain forms of reasoning in terms of "association" would be especially provocative to a *Lockean* audience, given Locke's conception of association as a fundamentally *irrational* mode of belief formation.[10]

Nonetheless, given this, if we conceived of Hume's anti-rationalism in the traditional way, we would be forced to conclude that it is less radical than it might at first seem.[11] On this way of viewing things, the main point of disagreement between Hume and someone like Descartes seems to relate less to their fundamental understanding of the nature of reason as a faculty (at least in the demonstrative case) and more to the degree to which they believe this faculty to be capable of providing us with knowledge of reality, especially on a fundamental level. This is, of course, significant. But it is ultimately a difference of degree, as opposed to a difference of fundamental kind. In other words, on this way of viewing things, Hume starts to seem, less like an "arch-anti-rationalist" and more like an advocate for a sort of "very mitigated rationalism".

I think there is a sense in which this is just how many contemporary interpreters, especially in the "naturalist" camp, have read Hume. As I hope is clear, there is much in those readings that I am sympathetic to.

But at the same time, I think there can hardly be any doubt that Hume viewed his philosophy as aiming to undermine what he took to be a traditional philosophical conception of the nature of reason as a faculty and of its proper place in philosophy. In this sense, at least, there should be no question that Hume's project was, in part, a broadly "anti-rationalist" one – and a fairly radical one at that.[12] Thus, these comments leave us with the task of reconceiving of Hume's opposition to "rationalism" in ways that do better justice to what actually mattered most to Hume.

In what follows I want to suggest that, if we wish to locate the core of Hume's opposition to "rationalism" in this broader sense, we should turn away from the cognitive questions that form the focus of the traditional narrative to issues of a normative, meta-normative, and ultimately meta-philosophical sort. As such, in what follows, I want to explore Hume's opposition to "rationalism" in each of these three senses: (i) "rationalism" as a set of first-order normative claims about the role that reason *ought* to play in our epistemic and practical lives, (ii) "rationalism" as a set of broadly meta-normative claims about role of reason in explaining normative distinctions, *and* (iii) "rationalism" as a set of meta-philosophical claims about the proper role of reason-concepts like REASON or REASONING within philosophy.[13] As we will see, this will connect Hume's anti-rationalism in new ways with a series of central debates in contemporary epistemology – including debates about the role of reason-concepts in epistemology, debates about meta-epistemology, and the emerging wave of interest in treating basic questions in epistemology as questions in "conceptual ethics" or "conceptual engineering". In all these ways, we will see that getting a better grip on Hume's relationship to various forms of rationalism helps to shed light on his relevance to contemporary epistemology.

5.2 Normative Anti-Rationalism and the Dangerous Dilemma

If this is correct, the traditional rationalism vs. empiricism framework does not really capture what Hume is interested in opposing in his "anti-rationalist" moments. So, what exactly does the "rationalist" Hume is opposing maintain? As noted above, it seems to me that if we want to find the real core of Hume's anti-rationalism, we need to look beyond the traditional focus on Cognitive Rationalism – and toward more explicitly normative questions about the proper role of reason in philosophy and human life. This, of course, fits well with what we know of Hume's own intellectual biography. Particularly significant here seems to be Hume's youthful attempt to apply what he took to be the principles of Stoicism to his own life, which resulted in a nervous breakdown that was the inspiration for the closing section of Book 1 of the *Treatise*.

As this indicates, it seems plausible that the "rationalism" that Hume found most objectionable was less a matter of psychological claims about the nature of reason as a faculty, or even first-order epistemological claims about what we can cognize through use of that faculty, and more of explicitly normative claims about the role that this faculty should play in determining belief and action:

> **Normative Rationalism**: The deliverances of the faculty of reason ought to play a dominant role in determining what human beings believe and do.

In this context, Hume argues that reason should not have the *especially privileged* or *authoritative* role in a virtuous person's psychology that most philosophers have assigned to it.

This, it is important to stress, is a point that applies *equally* in an ethical *and* an epistemological context. In both, Hume argues that we can only determine when reason ought to guide us (as agents *or* as believers) by looking beyond reason to other mental faculties that must (in some sense) sit in judgment of reason for us. In short, for Hume, in both epistemology and ethics, reason is incapable of the sort of autonomous self-governance that many philosophers have attributed to it.

In epistemology, the need to look beyond reason in this way is, for the Hume of the *Treatise* at least, the product of a variety of considerations – most importantly, the attack on the authority of pure reason in *Treatise* 1.4.1. Taken together with the other "skeptical considerations" Hume outlines over the course of Book 1, this gives rise to what he calls a "dangerous dilemma" concerning the proper role of reason in our psychology:

> This question is very difficult, and reduces us to a very dangerous dilemma, whichever way we answer it. For if we assent to every trivial suggestion of the fancy; beside that these suggestions are often contrary to each other; they lead us into such errors, absurdities, and obscurities, that we must at last become ashamed of our credulity. ... But on the other hand, if the consideration of these instances makes us take a resolution to reject all the trivial suggestions of the fancy, and adhere to the understanding [i.e., reason] ... even this resolution, if steadily executed, would be dangerous, and attended with the most fatal consequences. For I have already shewn [Sect. 1.], that the understanding, when it acts alone, and according to its most general principles, entirely subverts itself, and leaves not the lowest degree of evidence in any proposition, either in philosophy or common life. ... If we embrace this [first] principle, and condemn all refined reasoning, we run into the most manifest absurdities. If we reject it in favour of these reasonings, we subvert

> entirely the human understanding. We have, therefore, no choice left but betwixt a false reason and none at all.
>
> (T 1.4.7.6–7)

As this passage makes clear, Hume believes himself to have shown in Book 1 of the *Treatise* that reason will entirely subvert itself if it is left to operate solely in accordance with its own principles. (Compare T 1.4.1.12) As a result, Hume argues that the proper use of reason must be regulated by something *external to it* – such as the other "more trivial and less regular" propensities of our imagination. But – and this is the other horn of the dilemma – if we simply allow our beliefs to be governed by any such propensity, we lose any meaningful distinction between mere fancies of the imagination and beliefs that are well-grounded in solid evidence and good reasoning. Thus, we arrive at a "dangerous dilemma" concerning how to determine in a principled fashion when reason should guide our beliefs and when it should not.

Notably, in order to support this conclusion, Hume's arguments in the *Treatise* do not need to establish that reason, when operating only in accordance with its own principles, must *completely undermine all belief*. Rather, the essential idea for our discussion is something more modest, and so more plausible – namely, that reason is self-undermining in something like following sense:

> **Reason as Self-Undermining**: The faculty of reason's own internal principles, if followed consistently, make it impossible for reason to accomplish *either* reason's aims *or* our aims in making use of reason to form beliefs.[14]

And this is considerably weaker than the claim that reason must completely undermine all belief when it operates in accordance with its own principles. For example, if we follow most early modern philosophers in thinking of reason as aiming at *scientia* – systematic and certain knowledge from first principles – then to establish Reason as Self-Undermining, we must only establish that the operations of reason are insufficient to provide us with this robust sort of knowledge. Or alternatively, if we follow Hume in thinking about our aims as inquirers in terms of the satisfaction of passions like "curiosity" and "ambition", these arguments need only establish that reason (when it operates in accordance with its own principles) is unable to satisfy these passions in many cases.[15]

In this way, the important point here is that, according to Hume, when reason operates in accordance with its own principles, it is incapable of satisfying *either* the ends that are traditionally assigned to it *or* the aims that are characteristic of normal forms of human inquiry. In

this way, Hume arrives at the conclusion that reason can only achieve any of these aims insofar as its use is "controll'd" by some principle or faculty *external to reason* – a principle that determines when our beliefs ought to determined by reason and when not. This is the role played by what Don Garrett has famously dubbed Hume's "Title Principle", which tells us that whether reason "ought to be assented to" is ultimately determined by other "propensities" of the mind, such as the passion of curiosity:[16]

> Nay if we are philosophers, it ought only to be upon sceptical principles, and from an inclination, which we feel to the employing ourselves after that manner. Where reason is lively, and mixes itself with some propensity, it ought to be assented to. Where it does not, it never can have any title to operate upon us.
>
> (T 1.4.7.11)

In this way, on my reading, we arrive at a form of virtue epistemology, on which an epistemically virtuous subject is one in whom reason plays an important, but not ultimately dominant, role in determining what one believes – a virtue epistemology, that is, in which the use of reason is "controll'd" by passions like curiosity and intellectual ambition.[17]

Moreover, the same basic point applies to the role of reason in a practical context as well – indeed, it is far less controversial there than it is in the epistemological domain. For there too, according to Hume, while reason plays an important role in determining the actions of a virtuous agent, this does not place reason in anything like the absolutely privileged role in settling what to do that many philosophers have assigned to it. That is, in both the epistemic and the practical spheres, Hume endorses the following:

> **Reason has no Essential Privilege**: We should *not* always consent to the deliverances of reason, *even* insofar as reason functions properly according to its own principles.

This, it is important to stress goes well beyond the claim (central to the standard rationalist vs. empiricist narrative) that reason needs *assistance* from other faculties like the senses to achieve its ends. For the claim here is not merely that reason must look beyond itself for additional cognitive resources to accomplish its goals. Rather, it is that reason must *place itself under the control* of something external to it to achieve these ends. In this sense, for Hume, reason is incapable of the sort of autonomous self-governance that many assigned to it.

5.3 Meta-Normative Anti-Rationalism and Rationalism in Hume and Kant

This represents one significant form of anti-rationalism in Hume. But as many have noted, this first-order *normative* anti-rationalism remains somewhat moderate insofar as it continues to give reason an important role in guiding us both theoretically and practically. Indeed, even in the *Treatise*, Hume is generally quite positive about reason as a faculty, provided it is properly "corrected" and limited in this way. So here again, it is not unnatural to see Hume as the proponent of a sort of "mitigated rationalism".

Once again, this is just the spirit in which Hume is often read today – especially by those who see Hume as a champion of a sort of modest, down-to-earth form of empirical or scientific reason. But this view of Hume as a sort of "heavily mitigated rationalist" begins to seem less apt when we turn from the normative to the meta-normative domain. For here Hume *does* aim to achieve something much more like a true "anti-rationalist revolution" – that is, an assault on the idea of reason as playing *a significant foundational meta-normative role*. Thus, to run with one of Hume's favorite metaphors, we might say that Hume does not aim to completely "dethrone" reason on the normative level – rather, there he seeks to institute a set of external checks on reason in roughly the manner characteristic of the establishment of the Glorious Revolution's form of constitutional monarchy. But, on the meta-normative level, Hume's anti-rationalism takes on much more of a radical, almost Jacobin, form.

To consider this aspect of Hume's anti-rationalism, let's turn then to "rationalism" as a meta-normative view. By this I have in mind views that attribute a central meta-normative role to the faculty or reason:

> **Meta-Normative Rationalism**: The faculty of reason should play a central and foundational role in explaining the nature and sources of normative and evaluative distinctions.[18]

It is here that Hume's anti-rationalism begins to seem more radical. For, unlike many of his opponents in *both* the traditional "empiricist" and "rationalist" camps, for Hume, reason plays at most a quite marginal role within our best account of the nature and source of normative thought and talk. So, here we finally seem to find something more like a really sharp contrast between Hume's views about reason and the traditional philosophical conception of the relationship between reason and philosophy.

Of course, the idea that Hume's "anti-rationalism" is most radical on the meta-normative, as opposed to the normative, level is hardly new. After

all, this is one of the main contentions of those who give an expressivist or quasi-realist reading of Hume's philosophy.[19] But while I am obviously in considerable sympathy with such views on a structural level, I am somewhat skeptical that Hume is best understood as an "expressivist quasi-realist" at least in the most familiar sense of these terms.[20] For example, while there *are* proto-expressivist elements within Hume's account of normative discourse, one of the striking things about that account is the degree to which it treats normative language as functioning in the *same way* as "descriptive" discourse about ordinary "matters of fact". Thus, contrary to non-global forms of expressivism, the tenor of Hume's discussion is to emphasize the *continuities* between normative and non-normative discourse as opposed to the alleged discontinuities between them.[21]

Similarly, while Hume does anticipate some elements of contemporary "quasi-realism", I don't believe that he is best read as treating meta-normative commitments as "normatively neutral" in the manner characteristic of contemporary quasi-realism.[22] Rather, how Hume develops his broadly sentimentalist answer to meta-normative questions seriously constrains his first-order normative views in both ethics and epistemology. In other words, in Hume's "sentimentalist virtue ethics and epistemology", there are deep and non-trivial connections between Hume's meta-normative sentimentalism and his commitment to a certain sort of virtue-theory on the normative level.[23]

5.4 Hume's Meta-Normative Anti-Rationalism

I will return to expressivist and quasi-realism readings of Hume in a moment.[24] But I agree with such readings that, in both an epistemic and a practical context, Hume aims to remove reason from its traditional meta-normative role. More precisely, in developing an account of normative thought and talk, Hume locates the source of our tendency to make "normative distinctions" in two basic features of human psychology, neither of which places reason in a particularly important role: (i) our tendency to feel certain *sentiments* in response to our own character and the character of others and (ii) our tendency to modify or "correct" these sentiments through the development of *linguistic conventions* for the use of normative terms in public language.

In developing this account, Hume begins with our capacity to feel a particular sort of sentimental response to a person's character. At least for the Hume of the *Treatise*, the sentiments at issue here are grounded in our basic propensity to *sympathize* with other persons – that is, to experience weaker versions of the passions and sentiments we believe them to feel.[25] Such sentiments are significant because they allow us to experience a *relatively* "impersonal" form of approval or disapproval of someone's

character and actions. For example, given this feature of human psychology, if we consider the character of someone who consistently causes those around them to experience pain, we will find ourselves experiencing a fainter form of pain in response.

For Hume, such sentiments are only one form our passions and emotions can take, and hardly the most powerful. So, they might seem like an odd place to focus in developing an account of the origins of normative thought and talk. Nonetheless, they are important for two reasons. First, like our other more violent passions, they are in principle capable of motivating us to act – and, in particular, can motivate us to try to improve our character. But second, they are highly malleable under the influence of how we imagine the individuals we are considering. Thus, unlike our more violent passions, they are well suited to modification and "correction" of the sort that Hume believes is required to develop a genuinely inter-subjective standard for normative evaluation.

Fundamentally, the need for this sort of "correction" arises (once again) because of the nature of human sympathy.[26] Given the operations of sympathy, when we find that someone has a sentimental reaction to something that differs from our own reaction to it, we will tend to experience a weaker version of their (contrary) sentiments. And this will stand in tension with our (contrary) initial reaction to the thing in question. In this way, differences in sentimental response naturally, for Hume, give rise to feelings of internal psychological tension. And, since such tension is itself unpleasant, we naturally seek to develop ways of minimizing it. In this way, for Hume, sympathy, *and not reason*, is the source of our fundamental drive toward a more "inter-subjective" or "objective" point of view on such matters.[27]

This, for Hume, is one of the primary causes of the development of public language. For, on Hume's account of language, any linguistic term is associated with certain conventions for its use.[28] And, setting aside the details of this account for the moment, the development of such shared linguistic terms is important for Hume in large part because of how it helps to minimize the feelings of internal tension which arise because of "disagreements in feeling" like those above. In particular, if everyone in some society uses a linguistic term whose proper use is conventionally tied to certain sentimental reactions, two things will tend to follow. First, the sentimental reactions of those in the society will come over time to generally approximate the conventionally appropriate responses. And second, in cases in which my reactions do not match these conventions, I will tend to discount these reactions as involving a sort of "mistake" on my part – that is, as involving something like a failure on my part to embody the *artificial virtue* of "linguistic propriety" that is associated with the correct use of the relevant linguistic term.[29]

This, in essence, represents Hume's account of the sort "correction" that takes us from our bare sentimental responses to something like an inter-subjective form of shared normative evaluation. But, of course, for this story to work, we must arrive at some shared conventional standard for the "correction" of our initial sentimental responses. Fortunately, Hume thinks that basic features of human psychology push us strongly in the direction of a particular solution to this coordination problem – not just in the case of normative terms, but much more generally – namely, that these sentiments should be "corrected" through an appeal to what we would feel if we viewed matters "on the general survey" and from "the common point of view" – that is (very roughly) from a perspective that abstracts from precisely those aspects of our personal perspective which give rise to the "disagreements in feeling" we are trying to avoid.[30]

In this way, for Hume, the very idea of "correcting" our sentiments is part of a fundamentally linguistic, and so conventional, response to the tensions that arise due to inter-subjective differences in feeling. This story *is* "expressivist" in at least one important explanatory respect – namely, that it views the *basic function* played by normative terms to be a non-representational one – i.e., the function of managing "disagreements in feeling" like those above – and sees any representational functions associated with these terms as a side-effect of this non-representational one.[31] But it might also be regarded as a form of "constructivism", albeit one that is quite different from what philosophers like Sharon Street tend to mean when they speak of "Humean constructivism" today:[32]

> **Hume's Constructivism**: The standards that govern the proper use of normative and evaluative concepts and terms are "constructed" through a social process of developing shared linguistic conventions, the purpose of which is to minimize "disagreements in feeling" through the "linguistic correction" of our sentiments.[33]

This, according to Hume, explains how we come to develop normative forms of thought and talk. But what explains the "normativity" of these conventions? That is, why *ought* we shape our normative thought and talk in accordance with their demands? I believe that Hume's best response to this question of "linguistic or cognitive normativity" involves applying his account of the "artificial virtues" to the special case of linguistic norms and conventions.[34] On such an account, if we ask what makes it the case that we "ought" to comply with the conventions for normative thought and talk that arise through this process, the answer will be that we ought to comply with them insofar as doing so is virtuous in the sense that arises out of this very process – namely, that we should do so insofar as this embodies the artificial or conventional virtue that Hume calls "linguistic propriety".

Of course, this answer to the "normative question" is itself circular, since it makes use of our own virtue terms in answering questions about the normativity of those very terms. But, for Hume at least, there would be no real alternative to this. That is, much like contemporary quasi-realists, for Hume any normative question can only be answered through use of the normative terms in which that question is raised.[35] But, unlike pure quasi-realists, Hume thinks that the proper account of the nature of normative thought and talk *does* place significant constraints on the proper reference of such talk. For instance, Hume is perfectly willing to give descriptive, if response-dependent, definitions of virtue and vice. And in doing so, he seems to accept that meta-normative theory places significant descriptive constraints on the character traits these terms can be correctly applied to. Moreover, as noted above, he seems to view these descriptive constraints on the correct use of normative terms as having broadly the same status as similar constraints on the correct use of non-normative terms. In this way, there seems to be a general picture of what Garrett has recently called "sense-based concepts" operating in the background of Hume's treatment of both normative and non-normative general terms.[36]

What is much less clear is whether Hume should be read as a sort of *impure* or *hybrid* or *non-standard* expressivist about normative terms.[37] Whether or not this is the case will depend on exactly what, for Hume, is involved in *correctly* using normative or evaluative terms, and whether these standards for correctness require the presence in the user of non-cognitive elements such as patterns of passionate response.[38] Once again, on my reading, this will ultimately be matter of what is involved in the virtue of *linguistic propriety* as applied to these terms – and, in particular, of whether this virtue requires, not just that one correctly *categorize* character traits (or ideas of those traits) using virtue terms, but also that one *feel* the appropriate sentiments in response to these characterizations.[39]

Unfortunately for attempts to categorize Hume with respect to contemporary debates about expressivism, his views about this issue seem somewhat ambivalent. For example, consider a person who correctly characterizes character traits with respect to the various forms of virtue and vice, but fails to feel anything in response to these characterizations. Clearly this person would fail to have certain *moral virtues* for Hume. And from his discussion of "projectivism" it is relatively clear that Hume thinks we will *tend* to think of these moral vices as involving a failure to use virtue terms in the manner that *linguistic propriety* requires, at least to some degree. But should we, *as philosophers*, ultimately endorse this conception of linguistic propriety? Or should we instead think of this as a purely moral, as opposed to linguistic, failure?[40] It is Hume's answer to *these* questions that will determine whether he is best understood as a kind of "impure expressivist", who treats certain sentimental responses

as partially constitutive of the correct use of moral terms – or whether he is a pure (response-dependent) descriptivist, who treats the correct use of moral terms to be solely a matter of their correct descriptive use, while continuing to regard a failure to feel the relevant sentiments as a form of moral (if not distinctively linguistic) vice.

Frustratingly, Hume is strikingly difficult to pin down on this point. To my mind, this may be because this question is not, for Hume, ultimately all that important. After all, one of the alleged lessons of Hume's account of virtue is that the distinction between (i) positive character traits we treat as *moral virtues* and (ii) those we treat as "useful and agreeable" *non-moral abilities* is a relatively superficial one. If we extend this point to the present debate about exactly how to classify such failures of moral motivation, we are naturally led to the conclusion that these questions of classification are relatively superficial. If so, there may be a sense in which the most Humean view of this debate is simply that it doesn't matter very much whether we classify Hume as an expressivist or not – provided we agree on the other elements within Hume's account.[41]

5.5 Meta-Philosophical Anti-Rationalism and Hume's Implicit Conceptual Ethics

If this is right, then in his meta-normative philosophy we can see Hume's anti-rationalism in an even more radical form than in his normative philosophy. For here, Hume's aim is not simply to argue that reason is incapable of *some* of what his rationalist opponents claim it can accomplish. Nor is his point that reason should not have *unconditional privilege* on the first-order normative level. It is instead that reason ultimately plays *little role at all* in accounting for the nature and source of normative distinctions. In other words, here reason is robbed, not just of its unquestioned authority in determining what to believe or do, but also of its ability to determine the nature of such questions in the first place.

Of course, one might object to this claim by pointing out that reason *does* play a significant role in this story at a variety of points – e.g., in generating beliefs that help motivate us to take up the "general point of view" *or* in shaping what that "point of view" involves. To be clear, I have no desire to contest the claim that reason plays an important role in Hume's account of the origins of "normative distinctions" these ways. But the important point for present purposes is that while reason does sometimes play a role here, at no point in this story is reason *as such* decisive in it. In other words, while reasoning shapes the psychological processes Hume is describing in a variety of ways, the distinction between (say) reasoning *as such* and other forms of association in imagination plays very little role in it. For the sake of this story, in other words, it simply doesn't matter much

which elements of the story we assign to reason and which we assign to other mental faculties. In this way, once again, reason *as such* doesn't play a deep role in Hume's meta-normative account – although this account does at many junctures make an appeal to operations of reason and their products.

For these reasons, it seems to me that these meta-normative topics get us far closer to the core of Hume's anti-rationalism. But this is not the end of our journey. For this assault on the meta-normative authority of reason is only one aspect of a fourth form of anti-rationalism in Hume: what we might call Hume's *meta-philosophical anti-rationalism* – that is, his opposition to rationalism in the following meta-philosophical sense:

> **Meta-Philosophical Rationalism**: One of the central elements within the proper linguistic/conceptual framework for doing philosophy is reason-terms and -concepts like REASON or REASONING.

With respect to this form of anti-rationalism, the crucial question is whether the concept of reason carves nature at a significant explanatory or normative joint. As we have seen, Hume is skeptical about the traditional role assigned to reason-concepts in both these contexts. In an explanatory context, for example, in arguing that the most important operation of reason – probable reasoning – is the product of a form of customary association, Hume presents us with a picture of reason as a faculty on which this faculty often operates in a similar manner to many forms of "non-inferential" association in the imagination. Thus, the general tendency of Hume's cognitive psychology is to undermine the traditional idea that reason as a faculty should play a radically different explanatory role than that played by other mental faculties like the imagination:

> … all our reasonings concerning causes and effects are derived from nothing but custom; and … belief is more properly an act of the sensitive, than of the cogitative part of our natures.
>
> (T 1.4.1.8)

In this way, the thrust of Hume's discussion of reason in a descriptive, psychological context is generally that this faculty is *less distinctive* from the perspective of explanatory psychology than most philosophers have claimed it to be.[42]

Similarly, we've just seen that one of the main thrusts of Hume's normative and meta-normative philosophy is to call into question whether the concept of reason carves reality at a deep normative or evaluative joint. That is, for Hume, the question of *which* operations of the mind we assign to "reason" lacks the normative significance it has for most

philosophers. This point is, in turn, crucial for understanding many of Hume's arguments. For example, while Hume's claims about the inertness of reason are indeed meant to draw blood against many opposing views – once we are fully inside of Hume's system, these claims should appear to us much less significant than they seem from outside of it. For questions about the "possibility of practical reasoning" in this sense will only be as philosophically significant as the category of "reasoning" or "inference" itself is. And one of Hume's main aims in his discussion of "reason" is precisely to argue that the question of which mental associations we treat as instances of "reasoning" (or as "inferences") is far less important than most philosophers have thought. So, while Hume is a "skeptic" about the existence of practical reasoning in one sense – he is also, on a deeper level, a skeptic about the philosophical significance of *this very skepticism*.[43]

This is important for thinking about how Hume's claims about the faculty of reason should be translated into the reasons-centric framework that dominates much of contemporary meta-ethics.[44] But what is most important to me here is the more general point that Hume's anti-rationalism is (at least implicitly) a *meta-philosophical anti-rationalism* – that is, a skepticism about much of the significance which is traditionally attached to reason-concepts like REASON, REASONING, and INFERENCE in philosophy. In some ways this meta-philosophical or meta-conceptual anti-rationalism seems to me to represent the most interesting dimension of Hume's discussion of reason. But, of course, this dimension of Hume's anti-rationalism remains, for the most part, merely implicit. And this gives rise to a further puzzle about Hume's use of "reason" within his philosophy. Namely, why does Hume make such great use of a concept whose significance he also seems to systematically undermine in both an explanatory and a normative context?

To answer this question, we need to consider a series of questions in what has recently come to be called "conceptual ethics".[45] For example, what is it that recommends the extensive use of reason-concepts in a philosophical context for Hume? And why does Hume, after so thoroughly deflating the pretensions of his "rationalist" opponents, continue to make the concepts of REASON and REASONING *so* central to his philosophy? Why not, that is, go a step further and simply recommend doing away with the traditional distinction between reason and the imagination entirely, at least within the context of a philosophical "science of man"?

One answer to these questions would be to see Hume's use of these concepts as meant only to undermine (from the inside) a way of thinking about reason that he takes to be fundamentally broken – with an eye toward replacing this model with something better. This idea, that Hume generally makes use of something like the traditional concept of REASON in order to discredit it and replace it with a better concept of the same,

is one of the centerpieces of Baier's highly influential interpretation of Hume.[46] But while I am obviously quite sympathetic to many elements in Baier's discussion, I share the skepticism of most contemporary Hume scholars that Hume's use of "reason" exhibits the sorts of systematic shifts in meaning that Baier attributes to it. Instead, to understand why Hume does not adopt a more radical meta-linguistic or meta-conceptual position on this point, I think we need to think about how Hume would approach questions in "conceptual ethics" more generally. And to do this, I think we need to return to the connections I made above between Hume's account of the conventional artificial virtues and his views about the proper use of linguistic terms (and associated general ideas or concepts). For given Hume's understanding of public language as fundamentally conventional, the questions we are considering here concern, at least in considerable part, the propriety of a certain sort of "revolution" against prevailing linguistic convention.

As such, I think it is helpful here to compare Hume's reluctance with respect to such "linguistic" or "conceptual revolutions" to his more explicit reluctance to endorse revolutionary changes to political or legal conventions. For, in both cases, we can see in Hume a generally "conservative" attitude with respect to dramatic shifts in our conventions (and the artificial virtues associated with them):

> But though, on some occasions, it may be justifiable, both in sound politics and morality, to resist supreme power, **it is certain, that in the ordinary course of human affairs nothing can be more pernicious and criminal**; and that besides the convulsions, which always attend revolutions, such a practice tends directly to the subversion of all government, and the causing an universal anarchy and confusion among mankind.
>
> (T 3.2.10.1, my emphasis)

Thus, while Hume does allow that political and social revolutions are sometimes justified, the bar for such forms of resistance remains very high:

> We ought always to weigh the advantages, which we reap from authority, against the disadvantages; and by this means we shall become more scrupulous of putting in practice the doctrine of resistance. **The common rule requires submission; and it is only in cases of grievous tyranny and oppression, that the exception can take place.**
>
> (T 3.2.10.1, my emphasis)

My suggestion is that Hume would, for better or worse, apply the same sort of "Burkean conservatism" to questions in conceptual ethics that he

applies to legal and political changes. That is, for Hume, in considering whether we should adopt a revolution in our use of terms like "reason", we need to consider whether the use of these terms involves the linguistic equivalent of "grievous tyranny and oppression" – or whether the negative consequences of current linguistic conventions could be avoided through modest reforms. Rightly or wrongly, it is this, I believe, that explains why Hume continues to make extensive use of reason-concepts in his philosophy, even while systematically undermining their pretentions to explanatory and normative significance in a wide variety of ways.[47]

As this makes clear, there is a sense in which even Hume's meta-philosophical anti-rationalism remains a "mitigated" one. If I am right, the fundamental reason for this is Hume's generally conservative attitude toward "revolutions" in all human conventions. This, once again, points to the foundational role of such conventions in Hume's philosophical project. But while there is much in that aspect of Hume's philosophy that seems to me attractive, his deeply conservative attitude toward such conventions seems to me something we should reject – not least because it is closely associated with the bigoted racism and sexism Hume often displays. The question this raises is whether such a reform in Hume's philosophy would point us toward a more radical form of anti-rationalism – one which is only implicit in Hume's own work – or whether it gives us reason to be skeptical of Hume's anti-rationalist project more generally. But that is a question for another time.

Still, as we have seen, better understanding Hume's anti-rationalism has the potential to illuminate several central debates in contemporary epistemology. For instance, doing so suggests that Hume is best regarded – not as a proponent of a reasons-first approach to epistemological questions – but rather, as someone who is skeptical of the foundational significance of reason-concepts quite generally. Similarly, viewing Hume in this way brings out how his views about foundational epistemological and methodological questions anticipate the recent wave of work in "conceptual ethics" or "conceptual engineering". In doing so, it suggests a picture of Hume's relevance for contemporary epistemology on which this has less to do with familiar debates about, say, the rationality of induction, and more to do with the prospects for developing a genuinely Humean form of conceptual ethics – that is, a Humean critique of the basic conceptual toolbox we as analytical philosophers make use of in thinking about epistemological questions.

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Notes

1 In doing so, I will focus primarily on the *Treatise*, since it is there that Hume's systematic ambitions as a philosopher are most clearly on display. This focus is natural insofar as I agree with (Harris 2015)'s claim that one of the changes between the *Treatise* and the *Enquiries* is a turn away from the attempt to develop a fully systematic philosophy by Hume. For a contrary presentation of the *Enquiry* as the best systematic treatment of Hume's epistemology, see Qu (2020). But Qu would acknowledge that Hume's anti-rationalism is most fully on display in the *Treatise* as opposed to his later works.
2 See, for example, Ainslie (2010, 2015), Waldow (2020), Schafer (2019).
3 There is, of course, a fair amount of terminological variation in how figures during this period use the terms "reason", "intellect", and "the understanding". For the sake of simplicity, I'll mostly focus here on "reason" (with the understanding that Hume often uses "the understanding" and "reason" to refer to the same mental faculty).
4 See, e.g., Garrett (1997).
5 See, e.g., Kail (2008); Loeb (1981); Norton (1981); Gaukroger (2012); Garber (1998).
6 Leibniz here is a more complicated case.
7 For detailed discussion of Hume's conception of reason, see Owen (1999); Garrett (1997, 2015); Millican (2014).
8 I leave to the side here the question of whether the limiting case of a single intuition counts as an instance of "reasoning".
9 This focus on a "non-formal" account of reasoning is also the source of some of the difficulties in placing Hume's metaethical views within the contemporary debate about expressivism.
10 For more on the importance of this aspect of Locke's views, see Tabb (n.d.).
11 Interestingly, this *also* seems to be true of Hume's famous insistence on the "inertness" of reason as a faculty. For here too Hume's opponents do not sort neatly in accordance with the empiricist vs. rationalist framework. For example, his targets here surely include some canonical empiricists like Locke, as well as Aristotelians and Platonists who do not fall into *either* of these two camps in a neat way. But they do not seem to include at least *some* rationalists like Descartes, at least insofar as Descartes also separates the intellect from the will.
12 See, e.g., Gill (2007).
13 Note that, in thinking about Hume's anti-rationalism, we should try to frame our discussion as much as possible in terms of claims about the faculty of reason and its place in philosophy, as opposed to in terms of (claims about "reasons" or "rationality" in the contemporary sense of these terms. Compare

Setiya (2004), Sayre-McCord(2008), Schafer (2008, forthcoming), Radcliffe (1997) and see, especially, Cottrell (forthcoming), Schafer (n.d.). I say this, not because I share the view that Hume *completely lacks* the concept of a normative reason, which seems to me implausible, but rather for two more modest reasons. First, while Hume does sometimes speak of "reasons" in something like the contemporary sense of "considerations that count in favor of an attitude or action", the consistent focus of his attacks on rationalism is on claims about the nature and status of the *faculty of reason*. And second, while it is certainly possible to translate Hume's claims about "reason" (as a faculty) into claims about "reasons" in the contemporary sense of this term, it seems to me that disputes about this issue are often driven, less by Hume's own philosophy, and more by disputes in contemporary metaethics about the proper role of such concepts.

14 Some may be surprised here to find Hume associating the faculty of reason with internal aims. But Hume is clear that when we think of the world using concepts like those of mental faculties, we carve up reality by treating it as if its operations were for the sake of certain ends (see 1.4.6) The important point, for Hume, is that such descriptions do not represent metaphysically deep facts about reality. For more discussion of this aspect of Hume's philosophy, see Cottrell (forthcoming), Schafer (forthcoming).

15 For more on Hume on curiosity and inquiry, see Schafer (2014b).

16 See Garrett (1997, 2015). Compare:

> After the most accurate and exact of my reasonings, I can give no reason why I should assent to it; and feel nothing but a strong propensity to consider objects strongly in that view, under which they appear to me.
>
> (T 1.4.7.3)

17 Schafer (2014b, forthcoming, 2019).

18 In saying this, I acknowledge that the line between "normative" and "meta-normative" questions is often blurry, and that there's an element of anachronism in applying that distinction to Hume. But I take it that there is a familiar, if rough, distinction between first-order normative questions and more foundational or meta-normative questions. To a first approximation, what I have in mind here is *something* like Hume's distinction between the philosopher as anatomist (who is developing an explanation of the way we think/talk about morality in broadly descriptive terms) and as painter (who is using that moral vocabulary in a morally engaged manner to argue for particular moral conclusions about what we ought to do).

19 See, in particular, Blackburn (1998).

20 At least as this phrase is understood in Gibbard (1990, 2003), Blackburn (1998). The term "expressivism" is used in the contemporary literature to refer to a wide variety of (sometimes loosely) related views – and it is not difficult to find anticipations of *many* of these in Hume. For some of the complexities with respect to the contemporary debate about expressivism, see Schroeder (2008, 2010).

21 Again, insofar as Hume generally characterizes the meaning of linguistic terms in terms of the mental states they express, there is a clear sense in which his global meta-semantic strategy might be described as an expressivist one. I discuss the foundations of Hume's philosophy of language in more detail in Schafer (2019). See also Broughton (2000), Ainslie (2010), Waldow (2020), Lenz (2022).
22 Thus, unlike most contemporary quasi-realists, Hume's ambition is not to mimic *everything* that a committed realist would say about such matters within first-order normative theorizing.
23 See Schafer (2014b, 2019, forthcoming). Compare Ridge (2003), Setiya (2004), Sayre-McCord (2008), Swanton (2007, 2010), Vitz (2009), Cohon (2008), Driver (2012).
24 For related discussion, see Beauchamp (2008).
25 For some discussion of the complexities of Hume's account of this, see Schmitter (2010), Schmitter (2013), Taylor (2015), Vitz (2004, 2014), Debes (2007). I hope to limit myself to *relatively* uncontroversial points here.
26 Compare Garrett (2015), Sayre-McCord (1994), Radcliffe (1994).
27 Of course, reasoning will play an important role in the development of the linguistic conventions we will turn to now – since reasoning is responsible for most of our beliefs about absent matters of fact. But the significance of reason in this regard is merely instrumental. Reasoning matters in this context merely as source of such beliefs. For instance, if we were supplied with all the relevant beliefs from some other source, the story would proceed in much the same fashion.
28 As is indicated by Hume's discussion of abstract terms and their associated "revival sets", such conventions generally speak to both *which* things a term is properly applied to and *which* states of mind are standardly conjoined with its use. As such, at least on a superficial level, Hume's account of such linguistic conventions at least *seems* to involve both (in some sense) "descriptivist" and "expressivist" elements.
29 But see below for some of the complexities with respect to this claim. Compare Schafer (2019).
30 Here we can see what Sayre-McCord calls Hume's "Bauhaus approach to ethics". See Sayre-McCord (1994), Cohon (2008).
31 Compare the hypothetical genealogy for such terms presented in Dreier (2012).
32 Street (2008, 2010).
33 Again, from one point of view, this might be better described as a non-standard form of expressivism. To my mind, this indicates how these views tend to converge, see Schafer (2014a).
34 See Schafer (2019).
35 Blackburn (1998), Gibbard (2003).
36 Garrett (2015).
37 For views in the contemporary literature with this general flavor, see (e.g.) Ridge (2006), Schroeder (2013), Finlay (2014), Bedke (2018), Toppinen (2017), Perl (2020).
38 Compare again the set-up in Schroeder (2010).

39 There is a technical issue with the inclusion of, not just ideas, but also impressions like the passions within a general term's "revival set" – namely, that the imagination has much less freedom in associating vivacious impressions with one another than it does with respect to less vivacious ideas. This, I think, would clearly be an obstacle to including impressions *of sensation* within such "revival sets" for Hume, since our "freedom of association" in that case is very limited on Hume's view. But whether this constraint applies in the same way to impressions *of reflection* (like our passions or the impression from which our idea of necessary connection derives) is less clear, since the imagination does have more of an ability to shape our tendency to experience these impressions. Still, there are at least some general reasons here for thinking that the revival set associated with a general term should always characterized in terms of ideas (as a pure cognitivist reading of Hume would suggest).

40 And this, of course, is to say nothing of the further question of whether such linguistic failures would be semantic or pragmatic in character.

41 This also comes out in Hume's somewhat cavalier attitude towards the "definition" of general terms. Hume seems to regard such definitions as functioning primarily as "recipes" for the construction of the "revival set" of associated perceptions which provides a general term with its meaning (Garrett 2015). But his discussion of this is not always precise with respect to the question of exactly which elements of these "recipes" should be explicitly included within a term's "revival set". And it is also unclear where such recipes fall with respect to the semantics/pragmatics distinction familiar to us today.

42 Again, this raises questions about whether there is a deep tension within Hume's own conception of reason. As noted above, this is particularly interesting in light of Locke's conception of association as a fundamentally irrational mode of belief formation. Unlike Hume, in this Locke remains committed to a sharp distinction between reasoning and mere association *and* to the normative significance of this distinction. See Tabb (n.d.) for more on these issues.

43 In a variation on a familiar objection of Reid's, one might regard this as one of the natural products of the non-formal "theory of ideas" which Hume takes over from Descartes and Locke.

44 Compare Setiya (2004), Schafer (2008; forthcoming).

45 See, e.g., Burgess and Plunkett (2013a, 2013b).

46 Baier (2009).

47 Compare:

> By this expression it appears that the word, imagination, is commonly usd in two different senses; and tho' nothing be more contrary to true philosophy, than this inaccuracy, yet in the following reasonings I have often been obliged to fall into it.
>
> (T 1.3.9.fn7)

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6 Hume and the Unity of Reasons

Eva Schmidt

6.1 What Unity?

In current debates on the nature of normativity, philosophers investigate normative phenomena in parallel across different domains as a matter of course, especially the practical and the epistemic domains. Many participants in these debates put normative reasons – considerations that favor a certain response – at the center of their thought; they do so by considering reasons to act in parallel with reasons to believe, with reasons to intend, and sometimes with reasons for other attitudes. To illustrate this observation, proponents of reasons-first views, according to whom normative reasons explain all other normative phenomena, presuppose that their view holds across the different domains (e.g., Scanlon 1998; Schroeder 2021; Schmidt 2018; Kiesewetter 2017). Similarly, proponents of the reasoning view hold that normative reasons are premises of good reasoning, both toward action/intention and toward belief (Setiya 2014; Asarnow 2016; McHugh and Way 2022; Way 2017). And again, philosophers who spell out reasons as considerations that bear on a relevant question, or as answers to a relevant normative question, do so across domains (Hieronymi 2005; Logins 2022).[1]

Looking for historical predecessors of such a unifying take on reasons, reasoning, and normativity, Immanuel Kant's "unity of reason" thesis would seem to be an obvious candidate. He defends "the unity of practical with speculative reason in a common principle, since there can, in the end, be only one and the same reason, which must be distinguished merely in its application" (*Groundwork*, 4:391). David Hume, on the other hand, appears to be a bad fit: In the *Treatise*, he denies both that reason has more than an auxiliary role to play in moving us to act and that our passions – which are central for motivation to act – are representational. He further denies that reason grounds morality or that it enables us to grasp what is morally right or wrong. By contrast, he describes the theoretical reasoning processes of "wise" (EHU 10.4) or "just reasoners" (DNR 2.17)

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as responsive to the strength of their evidence (which we may, for our purposes here, identify with epistemic reasons), and thinks of judgment or belief as the outputs of our faculty of reason. This apparent recalcitrance of Hume's view vis-à-vis a unified picture of normativity across domains is exactly my motivation for investigating how far we can push a view that still deserves to be called "Humean" toward unification. Despite initial appearances to the contrary, is it possible to mold Hume's insights regarding reasons and reasoning into a view that is amenable to treating the practical and epistemic domains in parallel?

In this chapter, then, I will investigate the prospects of a unified Humean account of normativity across the practical and epistemic domains, and I will propose a Humean, unified account of normative reasons, reasoning, and central normative standings of action and belief. As might be expected, this account will not be as far-reaching as Kant's unity of reason. Moreover, the kind of unity I am interested in is not the claim that "epistemic and practical normativity are intertwined" (Hirvelä 2023, 691) – that the epistemic standing of our theoretical responses has an impact on what is practically or morally required of us, or vice versa. I read Hume as sympathetic to this kind of unity: Hume certainly thinks that theoretical reasoning correctly feeds into practical decision-making, since he grants reason an auxiliary role in motivating action (THN 2.3.3.3). Moreover, Hume's Title Principle (THN 1.4.7.11; see Garrett 2007) states that we are entitled to reason toward a belief just in case we are affectively/practically inclined to do so. My interest in this chapter is instead whether we can find, with Hume, substantial structural similarities between practical and epistemic reasons, reasoning, and normativity more generally.

Here are the unity theses I am after:

(1) *Unity of normative reasons*: Considerations that favor a response have substantially similar natures and function in similar ways in practical and epistemic domains.

Among others, reasons-first views exemplify this unity. Proponents typically claim that normative reasons both to believe and to act consist of facts that count in favor of a response by the subject and that the all-things-considered normative status of a belief or action as justified, right, etc., is determined by the balance of reasons for or against it. For example, the fact that the toddler fell into the pond is a normative reason for Solaika to believe that he is drowning as well as a reason for her to jump into the pond to save him. We can assume that, all things considered, both the belief and the action are justified for her because this reason outweighs reasons against so believing or acting, such as the fact that the pond is shallow or the fact that it would be uncomfortable to get wet. The *Unity*

of normative reasons requires substantial similarities between normative reasons in both domains, but not perfect sameness – for instance, it can allow that reasons to act balance permissively, while reasons to believe balance prohibitively (e.g., Brunero 2022).[2]

A different unity thesis concerns reasoning:

(2) *Unity of reasoning*: There are substantial commonalities between reasoning processes in practical and epistemic domains.

Again, many of the philosophers cited above endorse unity along these lines. Proponents of the reasoning view conceive of sound reasoning patterns along the lines of patterns that take the subject from fitting premise attitudes to fitting conclusion attitudes, like belief or intention, or to correct action. Similarly, discussions of the basing relation between certain attitudes and a subject's response to these often treat practical and theoretical reasoning in parallel (e.g., Mantel 2018; Neta 2019). In the example, Solaika's transitions from the belief that the toddler fell into the pond to believing that his life is in danger, and to jumping into the pond, both instantiate sound patterns of reasoning, by which these responses are justified.[3] Like the first, the second unity thesis does not require that practical and theoretical reasoning processes be perfectly aligned, but merely that they share substantial commonalities. For instance, deductive and inductive logic capture the rules of sound theoretical reasoning but are not a good fit for practical reasoning (Anscombe 1963/2000; Dancy 2018).[4]

If we endorse the first and the second unity claims, a third unity thesis naturally suggests itself:

(3) *Unity of motivating reasons*: Considerations that move us to give certain responses have substantially similar natures and function in similar ways in the practical and epistemic domains.

Motivating reasons are often conceived as considerations in light of which we act or believe, which we weigh and which – by being weighed – move us to give corresponding responses. In *good* cases of believing or acting on the basis of reasoning, it is our normative reasons themselves that motivate us to give the responses that they favor, all things considered (Dancy 2000; Mantel 2018). The case of Solaika is an example – in believing that the toddler is drowning, and in jumping into the pond, she gives correct responses for the very reason that favors her belief and her action (viz., that the toddler fell into the pond). Again, the third unity thesis allows that there may be some differences between motivating reasons in the practical and epistemic domains. For instance, it seems plausible that reasons for

action, but not reasons for belief, motivate by relating to the good of the subject or of other agents.

Against this backdrop, I will investigate whether we can find in Hume a unifying account of practical and epistemic reasons and reasoning that conceives of normative reasons in both domains uniformly as factors

i that contribute to fixing all-things-considered normative statuses of the subject's responses, such as being justified, and
ii that motivate subjects to give corresponding responses via reasoning.[5]

My aim is to determine what positive claims Hume makes about reasons and reasoning in the epistemic (Section 6.2) and practical domains (Section 6.3). I will investigate in what ways the epistemic and practical domains align, according to him; and whether a view in close proximity to Hume's position can be developed that incorporates the three unity claims (Section 6.4).

6.2 Hume on Epistemic Reasons and Theoretical Reasoning

In this and the following section, I will engage closely with Hume's views of reasons and reasoning, and of the resulting normative statuses of our responses, starting with his epistemology. Here, my focus will be on the *Treatise*, the first and the second *Enquiry*, and the *Dialogues*. I will start by reminding readers of some relevant Humean terminology, and describe how theoretical reasoning works, according to Hume, and how it relates to reasons and the normative status of belief.

Core elements of Hume's *epistemology* are impressions and ideas. In a subject's mind, impressions such as perceptual experiences, pains, but also emotions or desires, come first. The subject transitions to ideas by copying her original impressions, and thus forms beliefs, memories, imaginative states, or the like. Hume distinguishes impressions and ideas not only by how they are causally related, but also describing the original impressions as more forceful and lively than the ideas copied from them (EHU 2.3, 2.9). Our ideas are representational in that they represent the impressions from which they are copied. By contrast, Hume denies that impressions represent (THN 2.3.3.5). For instance, Soleika's visual impression of the pond does not represent a pond. It's not even clear whether Hume would agree that sensory impressions are *caused* by external objects – he slides from being noncommittal between realism and idealism about what causes impressions (THN 1.3.5.2, see De Pierris 2015, 79) toward realism about external objects (EHU 5.21, 12.7, 12.21, 12.25).

Next, Hume's understanding of belief is relevant to my project. He holds that belief is characterized by a specific feeling that accompanies certain

ideas: It is an especially vivid, forcible, firm conception of a state of affairs. Its vivacity makes belief somewhat similar to impressions, and it enables belief to govern action (EHU 5.11, 5.12; THN 1.3.7). Regarding things that can be believed, Hume distinguishes matters of fact, i.e., propositions supported directly by sensory experience or by reasoning from experience, and relations of ideas, i.e., propositions we can know intuitively or by deduction.[6] I focus on matters of fact for my purposes here – according to Hume, these can be ascertained by causal inference or by analogical reasoning (EHU 4, 5; THN 1.3.13; DNR 2.7). Here are schemas of three theoretical inference patterns:

Causal inference$_1$: Constant observed conjunction of events *c* and *e* $\xrightarrow{\text{inference}}$ *c* causes *e*.

Causal inference$_2$: Impression of *c* (or *e*) $\xrightarrow{\text{inference}}$ unobserved *e* (or *c*) obtains.[7]

Analogy: Similarities between objects *o* and *p* in some respects $\xrightarrow{\text{inference}}$ *o* and *p* are similar in further respects.

Hume famously holds that what moves us to make these transitions is custom or habit, a principle of human nature or natural instinct – not reasoning or reasons (THN 1.3.6.12, EHU 5.5, 5.8). He denies that these are *reasoning* patterns in the context of his discussion of the problem of induction. The worry on Hume's mind there is that we can give no argument to support the assumption that nature is uniform, even though all three inference patterns rely on this assumption. Elsewhere, Hume does speak of "reasoning" to describe these patterns (e.g., EHU 4.4, THN 1.3.6.16, DNR 11.2, 11.16). On this basis, I will provisionally do the same here (though I will address the concern that this isn't reasoning for Hume below).

How do these transitions move us to believe more concretely on Hume's picture? One aspect he emphasizes is that they involve the weighing of chances:

> There is certainly a probability, which arises from a superiority of chances on any side; and according as this superiority encreases, and surpasses the opposite chances, the probability receives a proportionable encrease, and begets still a higher degree of belief or assent to that side, in which we discover the superiority.
>
> (EHU 6.2)[8]

The core idea that Hume expresses here is that the "wise man proportions his belief to the evidence" (EHU 10.4). According to him, the subject's evidence supports a belief to the degree to which it (the evidence) is uniform

regarding the issue at hand. For instance, the more Iyad has experienced hitting the switch and the lamp lighting to co-occur, the stronger his evidence for the belief that the lamp in front of him will be lit, given that he is about to hit the switch. On the other hand, if Iyad has sometimes, or often, observed cases where hitting the switch wasn't followed by the lamp lighting, his belief that the lamp will be lit is not well supported by his observation that he (or someone else) is hitting the switch.[9] The same holds for analogical reasoning, which Hume discusses in detail in his criticism of the argument for design in the *Dialogues*: He says of "just reasoners" that, "[u]nless the cases be exactly similar, they repose no perfect confidence in applying their past observation to any particular phenomenon" (DNR 2.17). The passages from Hume not only highlight that the inference patterns involve *weighing* evidence, but also that Hume connects the evidence weighed, and the weighing/reasoning process, to a normative standing. This is, in the first instance, a normative standing of the reasoner, who is "wise" or "just" to the extent that she correctly bases her belief on her evidence. In the *Dialogues*, Hume also applies normative vocabulary directly to the inferred belief, for instance, when he speaks of a "legitimate conclusion" of analogical reasoning (DNR 12.6) or says that the evidence we have concerning God's attributes "can never be sufficient to *establish* that conclusion" (viz., the conclusion that God is morally perfect), suggesting that in other cases, evidence can be sufficient to establish a conclusion (DNR 11.8).

In Hume's picture, then, evidence for and against a belief competes in a transition from pre-existing mental states to a belief, and thereby jointly fixes the normative status of this belief as the belief of a just reasoner, as established or legitimate, that is, as justified. Such a transition is a process of theoretical reasoning, as this is understood in current debates, and such evidence comes down to epistemic normative reasons to believe. Subjects can believe for the reasons thereby weighed, so these are also motivating reasons. Connecting this to my question of unity, we have here (i) normative reasons understood as contributors to fixing the all-things-considered normative status of belief, to which (ii) subjects respond as motivating reasons, by forming justified belief via reasoning.

But is my reading convincing? As indicated above, Hume at times appears skeptical about the justificatory force of causal and analogical reasoning, and it may seem that this undermines any positive claims about epistemic normative reasons or theoretical reasoning in Hume. In his discussion of the problem of induction, he can be read as claiming that, while we *do* make transitions according to the three schemas above, this doesn't mean we *ought to*, or that this conveys any normative standing to the resulting beliefs (THN 3.1.2.27). We are driven by the natural instinct of custom to draw conclusions via causal or analogical reasoning, but since

we cannot justify the core assumption backing these patterns (the uniformity of nature), their premises do not contribute to any positive normative standing. And so arguably, we are not dealing with genuine reasoning or normative reasons, according to Hume.

My response is that this skeptical reading does not do justice to Hume, given a fuller view of his argument in Sections 5 and 12 of the *Enquiry* specifically.[10] He claims that causal (and presumably also analogical) reasoning mirrors the actual course of nature and is thus truth-conducive, given that we follow our natural instinct and weigh the evidence as he describes:

> Here, then, is a kind of pre-established harmony between the course of nature and the succession of our ideas; … [nature] has … implanted in us an instinct, which carries forward the thought in a correspondent course to that which she has established among external objects.
>
> (EHU 5.21–22)

What puts these reasoning patterns in a positive epistemic light – their truth-conduciveness – contrasts with the *Title Principle* that Hume espoused in the *Treatise*, according to which we are rationally entitled to follow our natural inclinations generally in coming to believe: "Where reason is lively, and mixes itself with some propensity, it *ought* to be assented to. Where it does not, it never can have any *title* to operate upon us" (THN 1.4.7. 11, emphasis added).

My suggestion is that, in the *Enquiry*, Hume defends a non-skeptical position that builds on the truth-conduciveness of the theoretical reasoning patterns backed by custom and habit. I lack the space to develop the details here, but I find the following interpretation of Hume highly plausible: According to Hsueh Qu (2020, 183), we start by trusting our faculties, including the faculty that enables us to draw causal and analogical inferences, which we are antecedently justified to do. We then turn our faculty on itself to investigate whether it is reliable, and by way of "benign bootstrapping", doing so confirms that it is indeed reliable, which endows it with consequent justification (Qu 2020, 185). Given this positive evaluation of our faculty of theoretical reasoning, and given that we transition from suitable starting points, the inference patterns characteristic of the faculty are able to confer justification on their conclusion attitudes. Qu calls this position he finds in Hume a "mitigated skepticism", contrasting with an excessive Pyrrhonian skepticism rejected by Hume. Unlike Qu, I believe we should think of the emerging view as an (albeit limited) *non*-skeptical view, since it maintains that many of our ordinary beliefs about our surroundings are epistemically justified.

On the basis of this non-skeptical reading of Hume, I submit that there is indeed a substantial Humean account of normative reasons to believe, which become motivating in reasoning, and which thereby determine the all-things-considered normative status of our beliefs as justified.

6.3 Hume on Practical Reasons and Reasoning

With this promising result, I turn to Hume on the *practical domain*. I here rely on the *Treatise*, but also on the second *Enquiry*. Does his view here include a similar picture of normative reasons and reasoning, allowing for a unifying Humean account? Let me start by removing an initial complication. The practical domain encompasses both moral reasons and practical reasons in the narrower sense of prudential reasons, and actions may be morally right/wrong as well as prudentially rational/irrational. For instance, Solaika's action of saving the child is morally right and based on a moral reason (that the toddler was drowning), whereas Iyad's action of switching on the lamp is prudentially justified and based on a prudential reason, say, the fact that he needed better light for reading. We can set this distinction aside, since in the *Treatise*, Hume conceives of prudence as a virtue – so, a prudent or practically rational action is in that respect virtuous, i.e., morally right (THN 3.3.1.30).

With this out of the way, we turn to Hume's account of the transition from mental states to action, to be picked out as "practical deliberation" in the following[11]:

Motivation to act: (prospect of) pain/pleasure from object *o* $\xrightarrow{\text{cause}}$ direct, motivating passion: aversion/desire $\xrightarrow{\text{cause}}$ avoidance/pursuit of *o* (THN 2.3.3.3)

To elaborate, *passions* are impressions, not ideas, and so they do not represent (THN 2.3.3.5). Elsewhere, Hume insists that they do have objects or ends – for instance, benevolence is directed at another person as its object; relatedly, it involves a regard to that person's interest, which is the end of benevolence to promote (THN 3.2.1.13, THN 2.2.6.4; see Schafer 2008, 200). *Direct* passions include desire, aversion, grief, joy, hope, and fear, and they arise directly in response to something good or bad, or the prospect of pleasure or pain (THN 2.3.9.2). As the schema indicates, reason or belief is not central to motivating action in Hume's view. Belief *is* relevant in cases where the prospect of pleasure or pain leads to desire or aversion, since this is plausibly spelled out as the belief that something might cause pleasure or pain. In this way, belief (and the faculty of reason, which produces belief) has a merely auxiliary role. More

broadly, it is needed to determine the existence of relevant objects and to determine how best to seek out or avoid these objects (THN 2.3.3). Hume's motivation is that such reasoning processes and the resulting beliefs are not of the right kind to impel action themselves – since, as we might put it, they have a mind-to-world direction of fit (see e.g., Setiya 2004). When Hume speaks of the *motive* of an action, he means the motivating passion in the above schema, not motivating reasons in the sense of considerations in the light of which an agent acts (THN 3.2.1.18, see Cohon 2018a). Typical motives are self-love, ingratitude, resentment, or affection for one's children (e.g., THN 3.1.1.24, 3.2.1.5, 3.2.1.10). The following example illustrates how pain/pleasure and desires, with support from instrumental beliefs and beliefs about what is painful or pleasurable, cause and thus explain action:

> Ask a man *why he uses exercise*; he will answer, *because he desires to keep his health*. If you then enquire, *why he desires health*, he will readily reply, *because sickness is painful*.
>
> … [H]e may also reply, that *it [health] is necessary for the exercise of his calling*. If you ask, *why he is anxious on that head*, he will answer, *because he desires to get money*. If you demand *why? It is the instrument of pleasure*, says he. And beyond this it is an absurdity to ask for a reason.
>
> (EPM, App. 1.18)

Similarly to the weighing that is involved in theoretical reasoning, practical deliberation involves a balancing process, but here it is passions that are balanced. This holds specifically in cases where different passions provide different impulses, one counteracting the other. For example, a calm passion, including a "view of the greatest possible good" of the agent may counteract a violent passion, such as the desire to consume heroine now (or *vice versa*). Hume observes that it is typically personal character that determines which passion wins (THN 2.3.3.10). Here is another example: "We surely take into consideration the happiness and misery of others, in weighing the several motives of action, and incline to the former, where no private regards draw us to seek our own promotion of advantage …" (EPM 2.39).[12]

So far, my focus has been on practical deliberation and action production. Let's now turn to what makes an action morally right or wrong – or, in Hume's terminology, virtuous or vicious. Following Rachel Cohon (2008, Chap. 4), I take it that, on Hume's view, the properties of being morally right or wrong are secondary qualities, which are instantiated, in the first instance, by a *character trait* due to its being disposed to produce the moral sentiments of moral approbation or disapprobation in an

observer (see also Setiya 2004, 381). The moral sentiments are pleasures and pains of a specific kind (THN 3.1.1.26), and they are elicited in the observer when she takes up a general point of view, while the mechanism of sympathy is operative in her, as she contemplates the person's character.[13] Sympathy is a principle of human nature with which we are naturally equipped (see THN 3.3.6). In this way, observers are directly sensorily aware of a character trait's virtuousness or viciousness by way of feeling approbation or disapprobation.

Our character traits give rise to our motivating passions, as when Solaika's love of children becomes manifest in her occurrent desire to promote the toddler's interest – in Hume's terms, her benevolence toward the toddler – which moves her to jump in the pond (see THN 2.2.9.3). We feel approbation or disapprobation of an agent's *motives* as well. Hume claims that we

> consider the natural and usual force of the passions, when we determine concerning vice and virtue; and if the passions depart very much from the common measures on either side, they are always disapprov'd as vicious. A man naturally loves his children better than is nephews, his nephews better than his cousins, his cousins better than strangers, where every thing else is equal. Hence arise our common measures of duty, in preferring the one to the other. Our sense of duty always follows the common and natural course of our passions.
>
> (THN 3.2.1.18)

In other words, whether a motive is given proper weight in our balancing the competing passions depends on what is the natural force of this kind of motive, as when my benevolence for my son outweighs that for my niece. Human observers, employing sympathy from a common point of view, respond to motivating passions with moral approbation or disapprobation, according as they have their proper weight or not. At bottom, it is this sensory response that explains the proper weight of motivating passions and in practical deliberation.[14]

Finally, the status of an *action* as morally right (wrong) is due to the virtuous (vicious) motive of the agent, from which she acts (THN 3.2.1.4). To illustrate, Solaika's saving the toddler is morally right because it is motivated by her benevolence. We discern the character trait's virtuousness, manifested by her motivating passion and issuing in her action, by contemplating her character, while relying on sympathy. When we do so, we feel moral approbation toward her, and in this way sense the virtuousness of her character, as well as her action's rightness.

Let me now connect the picture presented with my questions about reasons and reasoning. For Hume, actions result from mental transitions

that involve the balancing of different motives. The virtuousness or viciousness of the motives for which the agent acts determines whether her action is right or wrong. This is quite amenable to normative reasons as contributing factors to the all-things-considered normative status of actions, which can motivate the agent to act accordingly. There is one worry, however, about lining up Hume's view with a reasons-centric account: His motives, as passions, are quite different from motivating reasons, understood as considerations in the light of which an agent acts, and from normative reasons, conceived as favoring facts. As noted above, Hume holds that passions have objects (the person they are about) or ends (such as the person's happiness). But that a passion has an object or end is not to say that it has a consideration as its content. So how can the reasons picture get a grip?

In response, note first that in the above quotation from the second *Enquiry* (App. 1.18), Hume's assertion that "beyond this it is an absurdity to ask for a reason" implies that his questions (why the man exercises etc.) ask for *reasons*. If we take Hume literally, the answers to his questions give the man's reasons, such as the fact that sickness is painful or that health is necessary for his job. Plausibly, these reasons are the contents not of the man's passions, but of beliefs of the kind that, according to Hume, are relevant for practical deliberation, beliefs concerned with the prospects of pleasure or pain and instrumental beliefs. Note further that such considerations are associated with respective motivating passions – the prospect of a certain pleasure causes the agent to have a corresponding desire, and the belief that a means is instrumental to pursuing the desired object, together with the relevant desire, causes the agent to desire and pursue the means.[15]

My proposed Humean view, then, is that the reasons that are weighed in practical deliberation are the considerations believed that contribute to practical deliberation. Importantly, they are weighed as part and parcel with their associated motivating passions. A (motivating) reason's weight, as well as whether it weighs for or against an action, is determined by the strength and direction of the passion with which it is associated. For instance, Soleika desires to save the toddler, she believes that he will drown and that to save him, she needs to jump into the pond. On the other hand, she believes that jumping in the pond will make her wet, which causes an aversion to jump in the pond. In deliberating, she balances her direct passions – the desire to save the child against the aversion to jump in the pond; and bound up with these, she weighs the associated considerations that are believed – the prospect that the toddler will drown against the prospect of her getting wet. Soleika's desire to save the child outweighs her aversion against getting wet, and so she accords the consideration that the child will drown more weight than the consideration that she will get wet – it is the reason for which she jumps.

The weight of a normative reason can diverge from the motivating weight accorded the reason in an agent's deliberation (just imagine that Soleika lets the child drown to avoid getting wet). Hume spells out the proper weight of a passion by appealing to the weight that it normally or naturally has in humans, and this by appealing to observers' moral approbation or disapprobation regarding the passion with its given weight. This account can be extended to explain the weight of the associated normative reasons, and it can be combined with Hume's claim that it is the moral status of the motive that determines the moral status of the action: If the agent balances her passions properly, and thus accords her reasons the proper weight, she will act for virtuous motives and good reasons, and so her action will be morally right.[16]

As in the epistemic domain, skeptical worries can be raised about this proposal. As mentioned, Hume famously denies that reason makes much of a contribution to our motivation to act or to the moral status of action (THN 2.3.3, THN 3.1.1). In light of this, he is often understood as a *skeptic* about reason's – and, by the same token, reasons' or reasoning's – role with respect to the motivation of action or its moral status (e.g., Millgram 1995; Korsgaard 1986): It is not reason (reasons, reasoning) that impels us to act, and what is morally right or wrong is not fixed by what is reasonable or by reasons. If so, it is wrong-headed to try to give his views a reading that sees action as motivated by reasons, and the moral status of action as determined by normative reasons to which the agent responds.

My response to this worry is that the skeptical interpretation of Hume is not obligatory. On one plausible interpretation, his claims about reason are claims about the belief-forming faculty, which he sometimes also calls "understanding", and not about deliberative processes generally, or about the role of favoring reasons in determining moral status. On this reading, Hume's claims come down to saying that the faculty involved in motivating agents to act is distinct from the belief-forming faculty, and further that the latter faculty is not involved in determining whether an action is morally right or wrong. Hume can then still allow that we respond to normative reasons – together with the associated passions – in practical deliberation and that moral right or wrong is fixed by the reasons to which we thereby respond (Schafer 2008, 190), albeit always in combination with the relevant passions.

Notice an interesting difference to how Hume escapes skepticism in the epistemic domain, however. There, I proposed that Hume ascribes the positive status of being epistemically justified to beliefs (in part) because they track the truth; thus he should not be read as a skeptic. By contrast, our actions do not acquire their moral status by tracking anything external, and nothing external explains how responding to normative reasons in action makes for their positive normative status. What makes

an action right or wrong, and – more fundamentally – our motives and corresponding motivating reasons vicious or virtuous, is whether an observer, in the right conditions, is disposed to respond with approbation or disapprobation to them. This, however, does not detract from the fact that there is a substantial Humean account of normative reasons to act, to which we respond in practical deliberation (ii), and which – hand in hand with the associated motivating passions – determine the normative status of our actions (i).

6.4 Concluding Remarks

Let me pull the different strands of my interpretation of Hume's views together to show what kind of unity of reasons a Humean picture can provide. In both the epistemic and the practical domains, we find transitions from considerations that are weighed against each other, to relevant responses (viz., beliefs or actions). Such transitions can plausibly be called "reasoning" or "deliberation". Whether a response is epistemically justified or morally right depends on whether the subject balances her reasons the right way, though in the practical domain the weight of a normative reason depends on the correct weight of the associated passion.

There are some further, more Hume-specific commonalities between both domains. Hume's account uniformly relies on what responses are natural to humans, in that they are provided by natural instinct. In theoretical reasoning, we form justified beliefs about causes or effects or about unobserved objects by custom or habit. And the virtuousness of our passionate responses as well as that of our actions and our character traits depends, in the end, on sympathy, "a very powerful principle in human nature", which is universally shared (THN 3.3.6.1). Hume's appeal to natural instinct is, in both cases, motivated by his doubts about whether a sophisticated inferential capacity, i.e., reason, is up to important tasks like guiding us reliably to correct belief, motivating us to act, or determining what is morally right or wrong. Correspondingly, Hume defends a kind of sentimentalism in both domains, arguing that belief has a sentimental aspect, which ensures its force and thereby enables its role in guiding action, and claiming that moral judgment is a sensory response to an agent's character or actions.

Where do we stand, then, on the issue of whether a unity of reasons can be found in Hume? Recall that the unity theses were (1) the *unity of normative reasons*, according to which practical and epistemic normative reasons are substantially similar in nature and functioning; (2) the *unity of reasoning,* according to which reasoning processes in practical and epistemic domains have substantial similarities; and (3) the *unity of motivating reasons*: Motivating reasons in both domains are substantially similar in nature and functioning. The biggest obstacle to a unifying Humean

account is Hume's focus on passions as the motives of action, rather than mental states like belief, that have considerations as their contents, which can plausibly be assimilated to reasons (conceived as facts or considerations). To overcome this obstacle, I suggested a reading of Hume which takes the contents of belief that, for Hume, contribute to practical deliberation as the reasons for which we act, and takes them – when weighed correctly – to determine the moral status of action. The resulting view is still very much Humean, and according to it, both in acting and in believing, we give our responses for (motivating) reasons. If all goes well, we thereby also respond to the normative reasons favoring our responses, which together determine the normative status of our action or belief as justified. This, then, is the kind of unified account of reasons and reasoning we can find in Hume.

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Notes

1 For sure, there are also those who point out substantial differences, such as philosophers denying that epistemic reasons are genuinely normative, or are normative independently of their practical import (Steglich-Petersen 2018; Mantel 2019). But even these philosophers react to a broad agreement that there are strong parallels and tend to accept unity in some respects (e.g., Mantel 2013).

2 That is to say, it can allow that, where my reasons to φ and my reasons to ψ have the same weight, I am permitted to φ or ψ, but that where my reasons to believe p and my reasons to believe not-p are balanced, I am not permitted to believe either but am required to suspend.

3 What I have in mind here is *ex post* justification, as her responses are based on the very reasons that justify them, by way of her reasoning. I will pass over this subtlety in the following.

4 Notably, Hume himself seems to allow for unity along these lines:

> When a man, at any time, deliberates concerning his own conduct (as, whether he had better, in a particular emergence, assist a brother or a benefactor), he

> must consider these separate relations, with all the circumstances and situations of the persons, in order to determine the superior duty and obligation; And in order to determine the proportion of lines in any triangle, it is necessary to examine the nature of that figure, and the relation which its several parts bear to each other. But notwithstanding this *appearing similarity* in the two cases, there is, at bottom, an extreme difference between them. A speculative reasoner concerning triangles or circles considers the several known and given relations of the parts of these figures; and thence infers some unknown relation, which is dependent on the former. But in moral deliberations, we must be acquainted, before-hand, with all the objects, and all their relations to each other; and from a comparison of the whole, fix our choice or approbation. No new fact to be ascertained: No new relation to be discovered.
>
> (EPM App. 1.11)

The limit of unity that Hume emphasizes here is that theoretical reasoning results in belief, whereas practical deliberation results in the choice of an action.

5 Thus, I focus on normative reasons in the role of motivating reasons. I leave to one side the issue of how to think of motivating reasons in *bad* cases, i.e., where subjects are mistaken about the facts and are motivated by/reason from false considerations. This issue does not loom large in Hume's thought.

6 Hume mostly says that it is ideas that are believed, but he sometimes says this of propositions as well. Since nothing hangs on this for my question here, I will not explore this issue further, and I will talk about propositions as the contents of belief.

7 This pattern presupposes that *c* and *e* are established to be cause and effect, by the first inference pattern.

8 See also THN 1.3.12, and see Hume on the reasonability of believing in miracle reports at EHU 10.8 as well as his discussion of the argument for design at DNR 2.7.

9 I put the point here in terms of the degree of support that belief receives from the proportion of evidence. It is also possible to read Hume as talking about degrees of belief or credences that are supported, depending on the strength of the given evidence. I leave this option to one side here since I want to bring Hume into contact with the current debates on reasons for action and belief, which are standardly framed in terms of outright belief.

10 For a variety of non-skeptical (and subtly argued) readings of Hume's epistemological views, see De Pierris (2015), Garrett (2007), Qu (2020), and Schmitt (2014).

11 Hume says that agents "deliberate" in coming to act, e.g., at EPM (App. 1.11).

12 The same idea is implicit in the famous passage at THN 2.3.3.6, where Hume compares the interaction of the different forces of motives to "mechanics": Given the right kind of set-up "one pound weight [may] raise up a hundred". See also THN 3.2.2.13, 3.2.2.6.

13 This is a very brief and crude summary of Hume's views of the nature of virtue and vice, of sympathy, and the common point of view. Note that Hume further

connects our moral sentiments of approbation and disapprobation to whether a person's character is useful or agreeable to herself or to society (THN 3.3.1.30). For an overview, see Cohon (2018b).

14 For a similar view in the current debate (that does away with Hume's response-dependence), see Setiya (2007, 13). An example of weighing prudential against moral motives can be found at THN (3.3.3.3).

15 This is where Schafer's (2008, 200) insistence that passions have content, at least in the sense of being directed at an object or an end, can help since this allows passions and associated beliefs to be related by way of their contents.

16 My proposal partly builds on, but also diverges from other attempts to connect Hume's views to practical reason(s), e.g., those of Schafer (2008), Radcliffe (2021), or Setiya (2004).

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Part IV
Scepticism

7 Signs, Wonders, and Hume

From Humean Scepticism about Miracles and Reason to Contemporary Sceptical Hypotheses and Back Again

Kevin Meeker

David Hume's sceptical attack on belief in miracles sets the agenda for contemporary debates.[1] One scholar even proclaims that: "'Of Miracles' is probably the most widely discussed essay ever in philosophy of religion" (Levine 2008, 355). Most interpreters place this key section (10) from Hume's *An Enquiry concerning Human Understanding* in the context of Hume's broader theme of reason triumphing over religion. Curiously, though, there has been little if any systematic attempt to understand Hume's sceptical discussion of miracles in light of his most explicit examination of reason in general, entitled "Of scepticism with regard to reason" (T1.4.1), which plays a prominent role in his earlier *A Treatise of Human Nature*. This chapter aims to rectify the situation. The first major part selectively highlights important features of Hume's sceptical argument about miracles in order to explore some salient connections with his broader outlook on reason. This initial investigation explores how one might integrate Hume's complicated and possibly conflicting thoughts on scepticism from various contexts. The second main section turns to contemporary sceptical hypotheses – especially some nuanced versions of the simulation hypothesis – to examine how reasoning might be evaluated in debates structurally similar to Hume's discussions. Having forged these connections between Hume and present-day debates, the third main section briefly returns to Hume to explore aspects of his *Dialogues concerning Natural Religion* to see how he appears to anticipate some of these connections, which reignites smouldering questions about Hume's overall sceptical stance.

Our journey covers much intellectual terrain – including many texts – fairly quickly. In contrast to contemporary philosophy, which tends to focus on narrow questions in order to provide reasonably thorough – if not completely exhaustive – treatments of a topic, this chapter paints with a broad brush. Part of the point of this programmatic portrait is to perspicuously picture and thus distinguish the philosophical forest from the technical trees. By concentrating on some prominent structural features

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of Hume's thoughts against the backdrop of contemporary theories, we glimpse overlooked interpretive possibilities and philosophical lessons.

7.1 Musings about Miracles: Past and Present

Hume explicitly models his reasoning about miracles on an argument attacking the Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation that he asserts is as "… strong as any argument can possibly be supposed against a doctrine" (EHU10.1). That's high praise. Hume then confidently claims that the alleged strength of this reasoning transfers powerfully to his reasoning about miracles:

> Nothing is so convenient as a *decisive* argument of this kind…I flatter myself, that I have discovered an argument of this kind…which, if just, will, with the wise and learned, be an *everlasting check* to all kinds of superstitious delusion.
>
> (EHU10.2; emphasis added)

While Hume might have been partially on target about the enduring interest in his argument, he missed the mark with respect to its uniform reception among the "wise and learned". At one extreme are those who take a remarkably dim view of Hume's reasoning, with John Earman famously entitling his 2000 book *Hume's Abject Failure*. At the other end of the spectrum, some try to provide a charitable, coherent reading of Hume that avoids abject failure (see Fogelin 2003), while still others use Hume merely as a launching pad to produce "a modern Bayesian reconstruction" (Ahmed 2015, 1013) of the argument that can be branded "… an *a priori* argument against believing such testimony [for a miracle]" (Ahmed 2015, 1015).[2] Similarly polarizing debates arise about contextual issues. Although some commentators contend that certain contextual clues are *vital* for understanding Hume's argument, others claim that context is *unnecessary* to understand its basic gist (see Levine 2008, 353).

Although there is little agreement about even the most basic issues surrounding this argument, we can start by looking at Hume's own words on this subject to establish a framework for our discussion. At the very end of the first part of the section on miracles, Hume seems to conclude that:

> The plain consequence is (and it is a general maxim worthy of our attention), "That no testimony is sufficient to establish a miracle, unless the miracle be of such a kind, that its falsehood would be more miraculous, than the fact, which it endeavors to establish; and even in that case there is a mutual destruction of arguments, and the superior only gives

> us an assurance suitable to that degree of force, which remains, after deducting the inferior."
>
> (EHU10.13)[3]

Controversies erupt not only about how to interpret this maxim and the premises from which it follows but also about the strength of the argument as a whole. Is it demonstratively strong? That is, might the argument arise from what Hume elsewhere in the *Enquiry* calls relations of ideas (see EHU4.20)? Or does it belong in the category of matters of fact (see EHU4.20-1), such that the argument provides a strong evidential connection, but one that falls short of a demonstration?

The terms "consequence", "decisive argument", and "everlasting check" lend credence to thinking that Hume proffers a kind of demonstrative or conceptual argument. Constructing a clear demonstrative argument has been incredibly arduous, though, partly because of the difficulty we confront in trying to conceptually link metaphysical ideas such as natural law with other related ideas, especially epistemological ideas such as experience. Despite Hume's strong language, many scholars deny that Hume provides a demonstrative argument. Looking at the realm of nondemonstrative inferences, some interpret or evaluate his argument about miracles in light of his inductive practices (Earman 2000, vii), his empirical stance (Levine 2008, 355) and even question it in terms of its alleged neglect of what we now call abduction (Legg 2001).

As mentioned, however, few have tied Hume's sceptical approach towards miracles to his thoughts in "Of scepticism with regard to reason". In this latter discussion, we find arguments for two main conclusions, the first of which is that: "all [demonstrative] knowledge degenerates into probability" (T1.4.1.1). For Hume, even if we arrive at beliefs via "infallible" rules, we cannot claim to have certain knowledge because our inferential application of all rules is fallible. All arguments arise from the realm of "probability". No genuinely demonstrative knowledge exists.

But then Hume employs self-reflexive reasoning about the fallibility of his probabilistic reasoning to arrive at the second major conclusion: "When I reflect on the natural fallibility of my [probabilistic] judgment… all the rules of logic require a continual diminution, and at last a total extinction of belief and evidence" (T1.4.1.6). Surprising as this conclusion may seem, we should swiftly note that Hume appears to embrace it in other places in the *Treatise* – for instance, when he concedes in the conclusion of Book, I that he "…can look on no opinion as more probable or likely than another" (T1.4.7.8). If all reasoning is ultimately probabilistic/nondemonstrative and all such reasoning fails to provide any evidence/likelihood for any belief, then Hume's scepticism is globally significant. We have no rational beliefs. Not one. In other words, we lack epistemic

justification for any of our propositional attitudes. Any claim to knowledge – whether demonstrative or not – is an illusion.

So why do we believe anything if we are in such dire epistemic straits? Hume hypothesizes that:

> all probable reasoning is *nothing but a species of sensation*. 'Tis not solely in poetry and music, we must follow our taste and sentiment, but likewise in *philosophy*… When I give preference to one set of arguments above another, I do *nothing but decide from my feeling* concerning the superiority of their influence.
>
> (T1.3.8.12; emphasis added)

These startling statements raise troubling questions. Many scholars wonder how Hume could have wholeheartedly embraced such radically sceptical sentimentalism when he also often seemed to imply – if not clearly state, as in the discussion of miracles – that some beliefs were more rational than others. As a result, commentators for a long time have failed to engage certain passages and sections, such as "Of scepticism with regard to reason". More recently, though, some scholars have tried to come to grips with these sceptical words. Although certain scholars downplay these thoughts, others have increasingly contended that Hume meant to embrace these sceptical sentiments.[4] Still others split the difference in an intriguing way. That is, they postulate that while Hume's stance in the *Treatise* is radically sceptical, Hume abandons this stance by the time that he writes *Enquiry*.[5]

Although we don't have time to tackle this large issue more thoroughly here, I want to briefly suggest how to fit Hume's sceptical sentimentalism with his argument about miracles. The fact that there is such a wide range of interpretations on even the most basic issues is best explained by Hume's presenting the argument about miracles as a way to appeal to his audience's tastes and sentiments, not by any alleged power such an audience may have to grasp the exact evidential force of an argument. Compare this explanation with Earman's:

> Hume bobs and weaves, shifting among several different claims against the possibility of establishing the credibility of a miracle. The shiftiness is… symptomatic both of Hume's uncertainty about what he wanted to prove and also of his… doubts about what his arguments establish.
>
> (2000, 43–44)

By contrast, I do not think that Hume was uncertain as to his goal. He wanted to convince people not to believe in miracles. To achieve this goal, he operated in light of his explicit view that we accept arguments based

not on evidence but on taste. Hume's "shifting", then, is his attempt to bring to mind certain images that will *convince* his readers not to believe in miracles. Analytically precise philosophy is not up to this task. Artistic philosophy is. Hume is painting a picture; he is playing philosophical music. As he states in the Introduction to his *Treatise*:

> Amidst all this [philosophical] bustle, 'tis not reason, which carries the prize, but eloquence; and no man needs ever despair of gaining proselytes to the most extravagant hypothesis, who has art enough to represent it in any favourable colours. The victory is not gain'd by men at arms, who manage the pike and the sword; but by the trumpeters, drummers, and musicians of the army.
>
> (T Intro paragraph 2)

In his discussion of miracles, Hume is not trying to wield a sharp sword of precise logical rigor, but rather casting his lot with the musicians of the philosophical army.

In this light, consider again how Hume's miracles section begins by referencing a "decisive" argument against the doctrine of real presence that is "… a doctrine, so little worthy of a serious refutation…" (EHU10.1). Hume thought that Catholics would vehemently oppose this controversial claim while many of his Protestant readers would cheer his pronouncement.[6] The rhetorical flourishes of his expressed disapproval for this particular doctrine curry favour with much of his intended audience. As Jacovides points out: "… British intellectuals thought of themselves as less superstitious than their Catholic counterparts, and they never were more hostile to the supernatural than when thinking about purported Catholic miracles" (2022, 150). One can see why Hume might have thought that he would have been able to convince his main audience to reject belief in miracles by appealing to their strong hostile sentiments. He was in effect painting a picture of his audience in the image of those they most reviled. By redirecting their animus inward, Hume hoped to achieve his goal.

Of course, as a philosophical writer Hume was painting his picture with *words*. But recall that he explicitly claims that our sentiments cause us to accept one *argument* over another (T1.3.8.12). So when Earman complains that Hume's essay is "… a confection of rhetoric and *schein Geld*" (2000, 73), he is not far from recognizing Hume's true overall strategy. Even if Hume thinks that all beliefs lack rational support, that does not pose a problem with him arguing that his opponents have an inconsistent system, in that they reason in ways that they have vehemently opposed in their enemy. Technically, the claim that they are reasoning as their opponent is no more rational than its contrary. Practically, though, Hume's words are rhetorically appealing to the sentiments that animate their reasoning.

Admittedly, the picture that I have painted of Hume is controversial. Although more acceptable than it was several decades ago, it is far from a consensus reading. Moreover, this image of Hume's sentimentalism might be troubling to the eyes of most contemporary analytic philosophers. Even here, though, the tide may be turning. For example, Susanna Rinard is developing an influential version of pragmatic scepticism that bears a great deal of resemblance to this account of Hume (see Rinard 2022).

In any event, now that we have canvassed some of the issues involved in reading Hume's argument about miracles in light of his evaluation of reason, I want to bracket these broad sentimentalist controversies – if only for the time being – and turn to focus on the first main conclusion in "Of scepticism with regard to reason". Interestingly, despite continuing controversies about so many areas of Hume's philosophy, something approaching a consensus has emerged about this one important aspect of Hume's section, in particular his claim that: "all [demonstrative] knowledge degenerates into probability" (T1.4.1.1). Most today (possibly all?) agree that Hume never repudiated this first conclusion, even if they think that he renounced the second one.[7] Given this apparent consensus, we have a foothold to establish a connection between Hume's reasoning about miracles and reasoning itself.

Hume arrives at this first conclusion quickly because alleged demonstrative knowledge always has at its base causal processes which are "fallible", "uncertain" and "… very apt to… fall into error" (T1.4.1.1). Evaluating the causal processes of our faculties requires us to "… enlarge our view to comprehend a kind of history of all the instances wherein our understanding has deceive'd us…" (T1.4.1.1). For Hume, when we arrive at alleged demonstrative knowledge, we cannot simply claim to have attained certainty because intuition or some other such alleged faculty has given us absolute reliability in this one case. Even if we have attained truth no "… mathematician so expert in his science… place[s] entire confidence in any truth immediately upon his discovery of it" (T1.4.1.2). Causally produced beliefs shine a spotlight on the processes themselves, requiring us to defer to the results of future testing. Given the painfully obvious fallibility of our faculties, Hume points out that those with "…the best sense and longest experience… must be conscious of many errors in the past, and must still *dread the like in the future*" (T1.4.1.5; emphasis added). Because of our fallibility, any hope of rationally infallible certainty is always held hostage to future overturning experiences – either of ourselves or others. We can draw at least three important lessons from this discussion.

First, Hume's casting the rock of demonstrative knowledge into the sea of probability is in many ways remarkably similar to W. V. O. Quine's celebrated attack on the analytic/synthetic distinction. In the view of many, Quine effectively and influentially sank the idea that we can attain certain

knowledge of analytic statements insofar as they are definitionally true and (allegedly) forever sealed off from fallible empirical considerations. As he famously wrote:

> … no statement is immune from revision. Revision of even the logical law of the excluded middle has been proposed as a means of simplifying quantum mechanics; and what is the difference in principle between such a shift and the shift whereby Kepler superseded Ptolemy…?
>
> (1980, 43)

Just as Hume argued that empirical considerations such as the fallibility of our cognitive processes could affect alleged demonstrative knowledge, so, too, Quine argued that empirical considerations (e.g., quantum mechanics) can impact analytic statements such as logical "laws". In both cases, the sphere of infallibility is permanently punctured by fallible factors.[8]

Second, Hume's way of thinking about rationality shows that he thought of himself as being in dialogue with the "learned world" (T1.4.2) – both the learned world of his time as well as that of the future. In the penultimate paragraph of Book I he wonders whether "… we are still in too early of an age of the world to discover any principles, which will bear the examination of the latest posterity" (T1.4.7.14). Why would he dread the future and respect the examination of the latest posterity if he thought that he could have the final say for all time? In effect, Hume himself invites us to consider him as a philosophical interlocutor hundreds of years later.

Third, and on a related note, if we take Hume's point seriously, then that significantly limits our interpretive options regarding Hume's argument against miracles. For whatever the relation is between Hume's premises and his maxim, it is not demonstratively infallible. The latest posterity may offer a new perspective that shifts our understanding of the basic issues as well as what Hume said about them. Moreover, given the similarity between Hume's fallibilistic scepticism with regard to reason/demonstrative knowledge and Quine's influential attack on analyticity, it is not surprising that fewer scholars today think that Hume was trying to give an a priori proof against believing miracles based on testimony. Even the Bayesian reconstructionists seem to grant such a point and thus provide indirect confirmation of Hume's abandonment of demonstrative knowledge. For example, at the end of Ahmed's famous recent argument, he concedes that he cannot show the falsity of all objections to his argument "a priori" (2015, 1041) and thus laments that "my arguments do not after all realize the 'everlasting check'… that Hume envisaged" (2015, 1042). While Hume may have *hoped* for an everlasting check, his scepticism about reason has the Quinean consequence that there can be no rational basis to claim to have discovered infallible evidence to eternally

subvert the rationality of believing in miracles. Philosophy provides no such proofs.

7.2 Scepticism, Secular Miracles, and the Contemporary Scene

Even if I am correct about this consensus and its implications, that does not mean that Hume's argument lacks significant bite. One can still understand Hume's notion of a "proof" as a nondemonstrative argument whose logical strength is very close to a demonstration and is psychologically convincing (EHU6 note 9). In other words, one could claim that Hume has given a convincing "proof" of the irrationality of believing in miracles, even if the proof falls short of a pure demonstration. On this view, one might contend that there is only a very technical sense in which it is possible that one could reasonably believe in miracles, just as it is possible in a technical sense that the sun will not come up tomorrow (Hume's own example from EHU6 note 9). Such a possibility is so remote that we never have any real reason to believe in it. To be sure, the conclusion is indeed "*as entire as any argument from experience can possibly be imagined*" (EHU10.12; emphasis added). But it is not a logically necessary consequence of Hume's assumptions that belief in miracles is irrational; rather, given our background beliefs, the probability that there is a rational belief in miracles is so low that it is functionally equivalent to zero. Practically and probabilistically speaking, then, there is virtually no chance of ever forming a rational belief in miracles. Interestingly, Quine also made a similar point hundreds of years later. In his own words:

> Even telepathy and clairvoyance are scientific options, however moribund. It would take some extraordinary evidence to enliven them, but if that were to happen, then empiricism itself—the crowning norm… of naturalized epistemology—would go by the board. For… that norm, and naturalized epistemology itself, are integral to science, and science is *fallible* and corrigible.
>
> Science after such a convulsion would still be science, … hinging still on checkpoints in sensory prediction. The collapse of empiricism would admit extra input by telepathy or *revelation*, but the test of the resulting science would still be predicted sensation.
>
> (1990, 20–21; emphasis added)

Note how Quine emphasizes the *fallibility* of science in particular, and experience in general, in allowing for the possible rational establishment of revelation, which is something that presumably would be produced miraculously. But in Quinean terminology, it is a "moribund possibility". In other words, a Quinean may concede that it is *possible* that one could

rationally believe in miracles (perhaps following future scientists), but still deny the importance of the point.

Could interpreting Hume's argument as a "proof" in this strong but nondemonstrative sense "bear the examination of the latest posterity" (T1.4.7.14)? That is, can understanding Hume's scepticism about miracles as a nondemonstrative "proof" based on the contemporary idea that miracles are a "moribund possibility" help Hume avoid a broader scepticism about reason? Because Hume offers his arguments for philosophical posterity, it behoves us at this point to turn contemporary discussions of sceptical hypotheses. While there are several such hypotheses with a distinctly modern flavour – such as the Boltzmann brain hypothesis[9] – we focus on various versions of what is known as the simulation hypothesis to highlight striking structural similarities between them and Hume's reasoning about miracles. By most accounts, Nick Bostrum's (2003) article put the simulation hypothesis on the philosophical radar. To be brutally brief, Bostrum argues that, given certain plausible assumptions about consciousness, technology, and probability, there is a good chance that we live in a computer simulation. In other words, perhaps our universe is not real in the traditional sense but is instead a computer-generated virtual reality. Interestingly, like Hume's argument about miracles, this hypothesis has generated some technical discussions of probability but has also become widely discussed – not only in philosophy but also in other disciplines and popular culture as well, almost seeming to take on a life of its own.

Recently some scientists have begun to explore various simulation hypotheses in wondering how we might be able to distinguish experimentally between reality and virtual reality. One way to look for distinguishing evidence is to investigate the laws of nature. According to physicist John Barrow:

> [In a simulation] logical contradictions will inevitably arise and the laws in the simulation will appear to break down now and again. The inhabitants of the simulation… will occasionally be puzzled by the experimental results they obtain. The simulated astronomers might… make observations that show that their so-called constants of nature are very slowly changing.
>
> It is likely that there could even be sudden glitches in the laws that govern these simulated realities.
>
> (2007, 484)

Perhaps surprisingly, Barrow argues that there is at least some empirical evidence that there are such "glitches" or "drifts", most notably in the fine structure constant often called α.[10] The evidence is controversial, to be sure. Nevertheless, it is not purely abstract or moribund. As one recent

scientific article puts it: "The issue of a possible variability of fundamental physical constants has been put on the agenda of contemporary physics…" (Reinhold, 2006). Whether or not the claim that physical constants are changing is eventually accepted, it is clearly a live scientific possibility.[11] Notice that such possible glitches do not preclude Barrow from speaking about laws that govern the universe. Thus we appear to have some evidence – testimony from some scientists – that the constants/laws of nature change. In other words, testimonial evidence suggests transgressions of the laws of nature.

Let us explore this idea in more detail. If we live in a simulation, how can we conceive of the nature of the programmer(s) and the world as their creation that will allow us to make *some* predictions about their relationship to the regularities that we perceive? Assuming, for example, that the programmer(s) is at least minimally aware of the difficulties in constructing a virtual reality, then perhaps we can predict that they (or their code) will occasionally alter the laws that govern the simulation. According to Barrow:

> If the simulators use error-correcting computer codes to guard against the fallibility of their simulations as a whole…, then every so often a correction would take place to the state or laws governing the simulation. Mysterious sudden changes would occur that would appear to contravene the very laws of nature that the simulated scientists were in the habit of observing and predicting.
>
> (2007, 484)

But why would the programmer(s) not simply cover their tracks? Or wipe our memories once we have discovered the transgressions? The correction code version of the simulation hypothesis seems to presuppose indifference on the part of the programmer(s) as opposed to a desire to stay hidden. Alternatively, one could hypothesize that the programmer(s) create these glitches deliberately with the intention of deceiving or distracting the sims.[12] Clearly we face many variations of the simulation hypothesis depending on how one conceives of the abilities and intentions of the programmer(s).

Return now to Hume and consider his most expansive definition of a miracle: "a transgression of a law of nature by a particular volition of the deity, *or by the interposition of some invisible agent*" (EHU10.12, note 23; emphasis added). On most simulation hypotheses, the programmers are invisible agents to those in the simulation. Thus, glitches in the constants/laws of nature would count as miracles in Hume's definition of a miracle. In other words, the hypothesis that transgressions (e.g., glitches and drifts) of laws of nature are caused by invisible programmers is a hypothesis that a miracle has occurred, by the letter and spirit of Hume's argument.

Is there a significant difference between a deity-induced miracle and one caused by an invisible agent? The former case would be a religious miracle. But how should we categorize invisible agents? An invisible angel causing a transgression of a law of nature would presumably be a religious miracle. But an invisible programmer would, for many, not be a religious entity. So a glitch caused by a programmer might be considered a secular miracle. Note, though, that programmers presumably possess much more power over the (virtual) reality they have created than angels are usually understood to have as part of a created reality. It is thus not clear that the distinction between secular and religious miracles can survive scrutiny.

In any event, the structural similarity between simulation hypotheses and standard religious views of miracles that Hume mentions is striking. At the very least, the apparent rational acceptability of the simulation hypothesis – which in some versions seems to provide testimonial evidence for secular miracles that could plausibly be seen as religious miracles or structurally similar to them – seems to indicate that we can question the idea that Hume has provided a proof against miracles. Violations of laws of nature (possibly by invisible agents) do not necessarily present epistemic predicaments. On the contrary, they could be the key to unlocking very important features of the universe. In considering the error-correcting code version of the simulation hypothesis, Barrow argues:

> if we live in a simulated reality, we should expect occasional sudden glitches, small drifts in the supposed constants and laws of nature over time…and a dawning realization that the flaws of nature are as important as the laws of nature for our understanding of true reality.
> (2007, 485)

This would not be true for every hypothesis. As we have seen, on some simulation hypotheses deliberate transgressions are meant to *conceal* important truths from us. By contrast, on some religious hypotheses, deliberate transgressions are meant to *reveal* important truths to us. Barrow's secular miracle view is structurally similar to many religious views in that it jettisons the idea that we should be rationally suspicious of violations of the laws of nature. The key is the intentionality of the cause(s).[13] How would Hume react to such developments? In the next section, I'll suggest that in previously underappreciated ways, Hume anticipated these developments.

7.3 Hume Redux?

Hume mounts his most sustained philosophical treatment of religious issues in his posthumously published *Dialogues concerning Natural Religion*.

Unfortunately, its narrative nature presents more interpretive problems than his purely philosophical writings. The dialogue has three main characters: Philo, Cleanthes, and Demea. Generally speaking, scholars consider Philo to most closely represent Hume's settled sceptical opinions about religion, while Cleanthes embodies his chief rival: the experimental/natural theologian who argues philosophically that God exists based on the apparent order of the universe. One of the chief problems with this interpretive view is how the story concludes, with Philo stating:

> [If] Natural Theology… resolves itself into one simple, though somewhat ambiguous, at least undefined proposition, That the cause or causes of order in the universe probably bear some remote analogy to human intelligence… what can… [one] do more than give… philosophical assent to the proposition… and believe that the arguments on which it is established exceed the objections which lie against it? …A person, seasoned with a just sense of the imperfections of natural reason, will fly to revealed truth with the greatest avidity: While the haughty Dogmatist, persuaded that he can erect a complete system of Theology by the mere help of philosophy… rejects this adventitious instructor. To be a philosophical Sceptic is… the first and most essential step towards being a sound, believing Christian; a proposition which I would willingly recommend.
>
> (D12.33)

This passage seems to concede the partial rational success of Cleanthes' philosophic strategy, which sits uncomfortably with how most view Hume. How could someone with such sceptically atheistic leanings have conceded so much to theism?

Importantly, although Philo here appears to claim that scepticism leads one to theism, at other times he claims that the debate between theism and atheism "is merely verbal, or perhaps… still more incurably ambiguous" (D12.7). Even in the passage quoted above, Philo talks about how natural theology reduces to an "ambiguous" and "undefined" proposition about the cause(s) of the teleological structure of reality bearing a "remote analogy to human intelligence". Elsewhere Philo had pointed out that instead of explaining features of reality in terms of the classical God, we could variously appeal to "infant", "inferior" or "superannuated" deities (D 5.14). Philo likewise gestures towards "a thousand more of the same kind" of hypotheses that "have their place" as soon as we allow for a finite cause of the universe (D5.14). Clearly, some versions of the simulation hypothesis that account in various ways for the order of the universe in terms of programmer(s) bear some analogy to human intelligence. Although it would be implausible to say that Hume had these particular

theories in mind, the reference to unspecified, unnamed hypotheses shows that Hume was open to such hypotheses of the latest posterity. And, as with our discussion of the difference between secular miracles and religious, it is not a stretch to wonder if there is anything more than a verbal difference between many of these simulation hypotheses, and at least some religious ones (see Chalmers 2022, Chapter 7).

To say that many religious and secular hypotheses seem virtually indistinguishable is not to say that all are. Once again, there may be a hint of this in Hume. Recall that after Philo concedes a cause(s) of the universe, the difficulty we have reasoning about the nature of that cause(s) leads him to proclaim that those with: "a just sense of the imperfections of natural reason, will fly to revealed truth with the greatest avidity". Hypotheses that allow for revelation are of a different kind than those which do not. Although Hume seems to follow common classificatory practices by excluding them from natural theology, our discussion of secular miracles casts serious doubt on this strategy. As we have seen, some religious hypotheses are not much different from certain versions of the simulation hypothesis, with the world designed by, say, programmers who need error code to catch glitches in their design. The key is recognizing that – depending on the intentions of the cause(s)/programmer(s) – these hypotheses can be tested empirically. Even Quine recognized the possibility of (presumably miraculous) revelation being empirically testable, though he thought that it was an unrealistic possibility. Discussions of the simulation hypotheses provide more vividly realistic examples. Just as Chalmers has admitted that his long-held evidentially based atheism has been challenged by various simulation hypotheses that have forced him to "take the existence of a god much more seriously than [he] ever had before" (2022, 125), so too I am suggesting that at least some versions of the simulation hypothesis might make us take the rationality of believing in miracles much more seriously.

Moreover, note how Philo associates the dogmatism of natural theologians with a haughty rejection of the imperfections of human reason. The philosophical sceptics' acknowledgment of these imperfections is supposed to be closely tied to being a believing Christian. But what does Philo mean by scepticism here? Presumably, he means more than just Hume's general scepticism about purely demonstrative knowledge that most agree that Hume embraces. For that type of scepticism seems too specific to be applicable in these contexts. In addition, consider how Philo speaks of the ambiguity of these philosophical debates in the same way he talked about it with reference to the theist/atheist debate:

> It seems evident that the dispute between the Skeptics and Dogmatists is entirely verbal, or at least regards only the degrees of doubt and

> assurance which we ought to indulge with regard to all reasoning; and such disputes are commonly… verbal, and admit not of any precise determination.
>
> (D12.8)

The jarring nature of this pronouncement seems to derive from its blurring together of two contrary positions: scepticism and dogmatism (for more on the significance of this topic, see Meeker forthcoming). Although Philo's words are not clearly directed at the various hypotheses we have been discussing, there is an interesting contemporary parallel here. While many take at least some versions of the simulation hypotheses as having radically sceptical consequences, others, such as Chalmers, label these metaphysical and not sceptical hypotheses.[14] It is not unthinkable, then, to imagine that a detailed analysis of such debates might leave some grasping to find a nonverbal difference between sceptical and metaphysical (dogmatic?) interpretations of these hypotheses.

This last point notwithstanding, we seem to have returned to the bracketed question of the global significance of Hume's "Of scepticism with regard to reason" and his sceptical sentimentalism. Although we initially only considered the discussion of miracles in the context of Hume's disavowal of demonstrative knowledge, we have observed that questioning the "proof" against miracles from this more limited perspective has led us to many wide-ranging issues. To address this succinctly, let us turn to an often overlooked aspect of part II of his "Of Miracles" essay. There Hume claims that "the bigotry, ignorance, cunning, and roguery" (EHU10.26) of most humanity leads a "just reasoner" to view miracle reports "more properly as a subject of derision than of argument" (EHU 10.26). On the face of it, Hume's claim about miracles deserving derision and not argumentative analysis hearkens back to the point in the *Treatise* that we accept conclusions not on the basis of evidence but sentiment. In effect, Hume is again alerting us to his view that rhetoric – in this case, rhetorical derision – is what convinces people, not careful scrutiny.

What can be said on behalf of a more evidentialist reading of Hume here? In considering Hume's call for derision – along with some other comments Hume made – Millican claims that:

> Hume seems to be suggesting that all of us are prone to lose sound critical judgment if we get drawn too much into the particularities of specific tales. That being so, experience can teach us that sometimes it is rational *not* to rely on careful and detailed critical assessment, but instead prefer a verdict of a general rule without giving the matter too much thought.
>
> (2011, 181–182)

Paradoxically, this gloss seems to reinforce the sceptical sentimentalist reading. For if the pictures of specific stories are powerful enough to overwhelm our "critical" (rational/evidentially based?) judgment, then how different is this from Hume's idea that our beliefs are based on feelings inspired by philosophical poets and musicians? If even well-trained, sophisticated philosophers always succumb to stories, then the passions truly reign. Moreover, what justifies the general rule to ignore the particularities of tales? If those with the best critical thinking skills cannot even agree upon how to formulate Hume's basic maxim – let alone on the strength and nature of the argument for the maxim – then it seems suspicious at best to entertain the maxim as a general rule that asks us to abandon careful argumentative assessments in particular cases. Ironically, then, even contemporary defenders of the evidentialist Hume perplexingly propose ways of looking at miracles that one would expect from sceptical sentimentalists.

I have not claimed that it is impossible to provide a philosophically plausible reading of Hume that would support the view that he has some "proof" against miracles or some kind of evidential considerations that make derision more appropriate than careful philosophical argumentation in these contexts. Philosophers are a creative bunch. I fully expect evidentialist Humeans to continue to press their case. But in painting with a broad brush, in a Humean spirit, I have tried to tie together issues of scepticism, miracles, revelation, natural laws, and proof so that we can glimpse the interrelationships not only of Hume's sceptical sentimentalist approach to reason and miracles but also its striking connections to contemporary epistemological examinations of simulation hypotheses and the spillover effects in physics.

To summarize in less picturesque language: if we focus on the idea that there is no demonstrative knowledge, ably argued by Hume and reinforced by the Quinean influence on current epistemology, then we should seriously question the suggestion that there could be some rational "everlasting check" on belief in miracles. Even when we concentrate on the nondemonstrative notion of a Humean proof, and some admittedly abbreviated and selective aspects of contemporary simulation hypotheses, we glimpse the weaknesses of Hume's discussion with regard to the possible communicative and revelatory purposes behind why we might encounter violations of laws of nature. Considering these broad issues casts new light on how to assess the rationality of believing in miracles, but also the rationality of all our beliefs. Moreover, this makes us confront the sceptical sentimentalist perspective that keeps resurfacing as a plausible reading of Hume as well as a serious contemporary epistemological view, and this despite years of rejection from Hume scholars and epistemologists alike. Overall, then, the philosophical debates about reason, science,

scepticism, and miracles since Hume's day have arguably confirmed the first conclusion of Hume's "Of scepticism with regard to reason", made comprehensible the often misunderstood sceptical sentimentalism of the second part, and cast serious doubt on ever attaining an argument that will rationally convince the wise and learned of the irrationality of believing in miracles.

Notes

1 For help and encouragement on this paper, I'd like to thank Samuel Baker, Jonathan Cottrell, T. Allan Hillman, Allison Krile Thornton, Philip Habel, and Scott Stapleford.

2 Many of the debates about Hume's discussion of miracles revolve around technical questions, such as whether we should interpret Hume's points about evidence and probability as Bayesian or non-Bayesian (see Coleman 2001). Moreover, although Hume states his argument in terms of questioning the rationality of believing in a miracle based on the testimony of others, many think that his reasoning would also apply analogously to the "testimony" of our senses so that even a firsthand experience of a miracle would be rationally questionable as well.

3 Don Garrett speaks for many when he argues that this last paragraph is "Hume's intended conclusion in Part I [of Section 10]" (1997, 160). Many commentators focus exclusively on the reasoning of Part I; towards the end of this paper, though, we'll draw attention to an important if overlooked aspect of Part II.

4 For an overview of the history of interpretations of Hume's epistemology, as well as a systematic defence of the sceptical reading of Hume, see Meeker (2013).

5 McCormick (1999), Millican (2018), and Qu (2022) provide important theories on the relationship between the *Treatise* and the *Enquiry*.

6 Michael Jacovides explains that Hume "… places himself in the Anglican tradition of rational anti-Catholicism in order to undermine Christianity more generally" (Jacovides 2022, 150).

7 For more on this issue, see De Pierris (2005), Millican (2018, 170–172), and Meeker (2019).

8 For more on the relationship between Hume and Quine, see Meeker (2007, 2011, 2013, Chapter 2, 2019).

9 See Chalmers 2022, Chapter 7.

10 See also Webb (2001). For a more popular discussion of this issue, see Barrow and Webb (2005) and Webb (2003).

11 And one of great importance, according to physicist Lee Smolin:

> This is a small change [in the fine structure constant], but if it holds up, it is a momentous discovery, the most important in decades. This would be the first time that a fundamental constant of nature had been seen to vary over time.
>
> (Smolin 2006, 217)

12 For one such hypothesis, see Hanley (2009, 340). In light of this hypothesis, and given a certain plausible definition of the term "supernatural", he goes on to conclude "… the right sort of glitch in the simulation will be evidence for the *supernatural*" (2009, 341).

13 Millican, one of the staunchest defenders of all things Humean, also allows that there is a difference between theistic and atheistic explanations of violations of laws of nature; because theistic or religious explanations invoke divine intentions they have:

> the power to explain not only the conformity to causal laws (which accounts for the future in terms of the past), but also teleology (which accounts for the past in terms of the anticipated future, appealing to goals as well as to existing structures). And it is not difficult to *imagine* a world in which explanation of natural events in terms of divine purpose would prove to be of special value... a Deity who intervened to fulfill intelligible purposes (rather than working exclusively through uniform causal laws that reveal no teleological purpose) could indeed provide the theist with explanatory resources unavailable to the atheist.
>
> (2011, 183)

14 For a recent, comprehensive, and accessible account of Chalmers' views, see his 2022. For an interesting recent argument attacking the anti-sceptical nature of Chalmers' views, see Summers and Arvan (2022).

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8 Avoiding the Unexpected Circuit

Humean Improvements on Standard "Cartesian" Skepticism

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> To have recourse to the veracity of the supreme Being, in order to prove the veracity of our senses, is surely making a very unexpected circuit.
>
> (David Hume, EHU 12.13)

Much of the literature on skepticism in the last several decades has focused on skeptical arguments labeled "Cartesian." These arguments focus on some skeptical scenarios, our inability to know whether or not we are in such a scenario, and the consequences of this for the status of our ordinary beliefs. In this chapter, I compare the Cartesian argument to a different, Hume-inspired skeptical argument and argue that the Humean argument is more difficult and, in some ways, presents a deeper problem than the Cartesian one. The target of the Humean argument is our knowledge of that which is beyond our experiences and causes them—the external world. In this light, the Cartesian argument, which appeals to fanciful scenarios involving dreams and demons, is, like Descartes' own solution to it, "a very unexpected circuit."

8.1 Introduction

For most contemporary epistemologists, the problem of skepticism about the external world is known as "Cartesian" skepticism, and is identified with this "Cartesian" argument:

Cartesian argument:

1 You don't know that you're not a victim of Descartes' demon (or that you're not in some other skeptical scenario)
2 If you don't know that you're not a victim of Descartes' demon, then you don't know that you have hands.

So,

3 You don't know that you have hands.

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So,

4 Generalizing, you don't know that any external objects (beyond your senses) exist.

This is called "Cartesian" because it is based loosely on Descartes' first *Meditation*, in which he considers a couple of different "skeptical scenarios" (as they've come to be called): one in which he is dreaming, and the other in which he is deceived by a deceiving god, or an "evil demon" (as it has come to be known), which is an all-powerful creature intent on deceiving him about everything. Readers of the subsequent *Meditations* know that Descartes does not despair, and proposes a solution of sorts to whatever problem these possible scenarios raise. So he was no skeptic. His solution was to appeal to a non-deceiving God—which Hume called an "unexpected circuit" in proving "the veracity of our senses." But let us set aside Descartes' solution, and also the various ways in which the "Cartesian argument" and "Cartesian skepticism" are historically inaccurate labels. The fact is that the Cartesian argument was inspired by Descartes and has been the focus of most contemporary work on skepticism about the external world.[1]

In this chapter, I will suggest that the Cartesian skeptical argument itself, like Descartes' refutation of it according to Hume, takes an unexpected circuit. I compare it to a more direct skeptical argument inspired instead by Hume's writings, in particular his *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*. The Humean argument is more direct in that it does not involve skeptical scenarios or their relation to ordinary beliefs about the existence of objects. I will suggest that the Humean argument presents a more difficult problem about the external world since some popular objections to the Cartesian argument don't apply to the Humean one. These objections, or "solutions," to the Cartesian problem are cosmetic fixes that do not disturb the heart of the skeptical problem about the external world. On the other hand, solutions to the Humean problem will in general provide solutions to the Cartesian one. Thus, the Humean skeptical argument presents the more central core of the skeptical problem.

8.2 The Humean Skeptical Argument

In contemporary philosophy, Humean skepticism is often taken to be synonymous with the problem of induction, or how to justify beliefs about the unobserved on the basis of the observed.[2] But as any reader of Hume knows, there was more to Hume's skepticism than this, and he offered other arguments about the external world, or the objects beyond our perceptions.[3]

Though there are numerous arguments about the external world in Hume's work, I will focus on one in particular:

> "By what argument can it be proved, that the perceptions of the mind must be caused by external objects, entirely different from them, though resembling them (if that be possible) and could not arise either from the energy of the mind itself, or from the suggestion of some invisible and unknown spirit, or from some other cause still more unknown to us? It is acknowledged, that, in fact, many of these perceptions arise not from anything external, as in dreams, madness, and other diseases. And nothing can be more inexplicable than the manner, in which body should so operate upon mind as ever to convey an image of itself to a substance, supposed of so different, and even contrary a nature… .It is a question of fact, whether the perceptions of the senses be produced by external objects, resembling them: how shall this question be determined? By experience surely; as all other questions of a like nature. But here experience is, and must be entirely silent. The mind has never any thing present to it but the perceptions, and cannot possibly reach any experience of their connexion with objects. The supposition of such a connexion is, therefore, without any foundation in reasoning." (EHU 12.11–12) … "This is a topic, therefore, in which the profounder and more philosophical sceptics will always triumph, when they endevour to introduce an universal doubt into all subjects of human knowledge and enquiry."
>
> (EHU 12.14)

The target of this argument is the cause of our perceptions, or the external world, and as I suggest below, it is a powerful argument. However, even those few contemporary philosophers who have considered a "Humean" skepticism about the external world have often taken it to be a species or variation of his arguments about induction, or at least to require similar logical maneuvers as does the argument about induction, rather than focusing on this remarkable and rich passage that directly targets the external world. So, it will be helpful to begin by pointing out a crucial difference between this argument and Hume's arguments about induction.

Without getting into the details of Hume's problem of induction, one element of it should be familiar to anyone familiar with Hume's writings: the problem concerns the unobserved. That is, the problem is essentially about how to project what you have observed onto the unobserved regions of reality (such as places and things you have never observed, and future times that you have not yet observed). For example, you have observed the sun rising in the past, but what reason do you

have to believe that tomorrow the sun will rise again? In such a case, you have past observations to rely on. But in the above argument about the external world, you have no past observations to rely on, because you have never observed your experiences correlated or conjoined with the part of reality that causes them. You have never, and can never, pop out of your head and observe the way observations relate to their causes.[4] So the issue, at least with the argument that we are extracting from Hume's texts, is not how to project observed conjunctions onto the unobserved, but rather how to determine that which has never been and cannot be observed at all. The Humean argument I'm focusing on is not one of *projection*, or how we know that an observed pattern permeates all of nature, even unobserved portions of it. Rather, it is a problem of how we could apprehend something beyond what we observe, the causes of our observations, in the first place.

One might naturally take "observe" to be factive, and accordingly object like this: if what causes your perception of a table *is just the table*, then thereby the table is observed. If what causes your perception of a table is the mind of Descartes' demon, then if you are observing anything, you are thereby (unwittingly) observing the demon's mind. If so (and this is certainly discussable), then the problem of the external world is even more different than the problem of induction, because it has nothing to do with the unobserved at all. Rather, the problem hinges on some questions *about* what you observe when you observe a table, for example, what the nature of the table is: is it an idea in a demon's mind? Some digital bits in the computer running a simulation on your brain which is floating in a vat? One initial reservation about this understanding of the issue is that it seems to conflate the content of an observation with its cause. It is one thing for the demon's mind to cause your table perception; it is another for your table perception to *represent* the demon's mind. It seems, intuitively, that observation requires, not just a perception's being caused by what is observed, but also *representing* what is observed. I will take up this issue again below.

Crispin Wright (2004, 169–170) is one contemporary philosopher who engages with a Humean external world problem that is loosely based on the problem of induction, and his discussion is instructive. He convincingly rejects the idea that the Humean challenge is to find a *deductive* argument that vindicates our inductive inferences. On that idea, the Humean is looking for premises to add to any ampliative inference so that it forms a deductively valid argument. What can we add to "the sun has always risen" to form a deductive argument that "the sun will rise?" This is certainly not what Hume was doing, and clearly not the only (or the most interesting) philosophical problem in the neighborhood. Instead, as Wright sees it, the challenge is to provide an "informational setting" against which

the premises of an ampliative inference make the conclusion reasonable. For example, in the case of induction, something like the Uniformity of Nature (that the observed/past resembles the unobserved/future) will do. Assuming the Uniformity of Nature, that the sun has always risen does make it reasonable to infer (without being a deductive or logical guarantee) that the sun will rise. The problem, as Wright's Humean sees it, is that any appeal to such a principle is problematically *circular*, because the only way to justify one's belief in the Uniformity of Nature is by just such an inductive inference, which would again require the background information that Nature is Uniform. So, the format borrowed from the problem of induction is not the need to find a deductively valid inference, but rather to deal with an apparent circularity when providing the background premise for a merely *ampliative* inference (that is, an inference that increases justification to believe the conclusion without necessarily guaranteeing the truth of the conclusion).

In the case of the external world, what would that background premise, the analog of the Uniformity of Nature, be? And is justifying such a premise the only way to solve the problem of the external world? This is a bit unclear in the case of the external world, for while the Uniformity of Nature tells us that the unobserved resembles the observed, the causes of our perceptions are arguably *unobserved*, because you can never observe how your perceptions correlate with their causes, or whether the causes of your perceptions "resemble" those perceptions. Instead, perhaps we would need a principle like the Reliability of Experience: your senses do not generally deceive you. This is the direction Wright goes, treating something like that principle[5] like the Uniformity of Nature, and taking on the task of dealing with the apparently inevitable circularity of any attempt to secure it.

For the reasons above, and to start with a clean slate, I propose to start over with the Humean skeptical argument, and refrain from modeling it on the problem of induction or prejudging whether the problem hinges on issues of circularity—as we will see, circularity *does* come into play crucially, but should not be regarded as *sin qua non* of the Humean argument, which *any* solution must contend with. Instead, I propose the following reconstruction as the Humean argument (with "H" affixed to the premises for "Humean"):

H1. There can be no a priori reason for thinking that the causes of your sensory experiences resemble them.
H2. There can be no a posteriori reason for thinking that the causes of your sensory experiences resemble them.
H3. There is no other kind of reason you could have for thinking that the causes of your sensory experiences resemble them.

So,
H4. There can be no (epistemic) reason to think that the causes of your sensory experiences resemble them.
So,
H5. You do not know that the causes of your sensory experiences resemble them.

This argument is modeled closely on the passage, above, from EHU 12, instead of the problem of induction. If you do not know that the cause of your table experience, the thing before you, resembles a table (i.e., what it looks like to you), then you don't know what it is at all. So, you don't know much about the external world. Note that this conclusion differs from the Cartesian argument's conclusion, that you don't know *that there is a* table. I take up this difference below (when I consider "veridicalism").

A few initial clarifications will be helpful. First, the notion of resemblance here requires some clarification. What does it mean to say that something out in the world resembles an experience?[6] What thing in the world is "the cause?" What aspect of it and the experience are to resemble each other? Consider an ordinary case as we typically conceive of it (even if implicitly). There is a table here. You can see it before you and feel its pressure under your palms. The table is a rectangular, medium-sized, solid object which has a brownish color in daylight; by comparison, your visual experience is of (the content of your experience is that there is) a rectangular, medium-sized, brownish, thing, and your tactile experience is of something solid. So, the cause of your experience resembles it. But there are many important issues one could raise here, such as what, exactly, figures into "the content" of the experience (is rectangularity part of the content even though, while sitting at my table, my visual field contains no impressions of right angles?), and what physical entities and properties count as parts of the "cause" and the "table" in the first place (aren't the rays of light reflecting off the table the true causes of my experience?). Still, we have at least a rough, intuitive sense that in this case, the content of your experience (both visual and tactile) resembles an ordinary description of the object that caused it—at least in the sense that the object is a perspicuous part of the causal chain, and the best candidate to match the content of the experience. That is because the content of the experience is not that there are light rays entering your eyeballs, but that there is a medium-sized, brown object not far from you in space. This is at any rate how we typically take it for granted that things go. In a scenario in which you are a victim of Descartes' demon, your experience as of a table is caused, not by any medium-sized, brown, and solid thing, but by a Demonic mind which has no physical properties at all. So, clearly in this case, the content of your experience *does not* resemble its cause.

One might wonder whether, according to the latest scientific picture of things, we know that the causes of our experiences *do not* resemble them. That is, one might wonder whether the Humean argument is obviated by our scientific understanding of the world. What is in front of you is a swarm of particles arranged table-wise, and though some forces between the particles prevent your hand (another swarm) from pushing through it, this is not because it is "solid," since there is more empty space between the particles than there is matter. And on some ways of understanding physics, at bottom there aren't *particles* there at all, but something like energy fields. So, we not only don't know that the causes *do* resemble our experiences. We know that they *don't*.

Still, there is a clear sense in which a swarm of particles resembles the content of one's table experience, for example, because they are arranged roughly in a rectangular form. Likewise, though the table is mostly empty space, the relations and forces between its particles at least *resemble* the solidity represented in the content of the experience. In other words, the scientific image of the swarm of particles arranged table-wise merely replaces our older, more commonsense conception of a table, but it still *resembles* our table perception well enough. So the Humean argument, on this picture, challenges us to conjure a reason to think that *there is a swarm arranged table-wise* causing our table experience.

Moreover, the Humean argument is indifferent to what we think that, in the normal case, causes our experience and bears any resemblance relation to it. For the argument still purports to show that we don't *know* that any such swarm, or outer layer of a swarm, or light rays bouncing off of the swarm, causes our table perception, so the scientific view of things fails to obviate the Humean argument. The claim that we know that what is before you when it looks like there is a table is actually a swarm of particles seems like just the sort of empirical claim about the external world that the Humean argument—and the Cartesian argument for that matter—targets. So, according to the skeptical argument, you do not know that the scientific claim is true, any more than you know that anything else about the external world on the basis of your senses is true. Your evidence for the scientific image of things is a bunch of sensory input in the form of people's testimony, textbooks, and if you are yourself a scientist, some experiments. It is knowledge on the basis of those very experiences that is in question: according to the Cartesian argument, you'd have to know you're not in a skeptical scenario in order to know such things, and according to the Humean argument, you'd have to have a reason to think that the causes of those experiences resemble them—for example, when you do an experiment, do you have a reason to think that what causes your experimental observations is at all like those observations? If not, how do you know that that it is a swarm as, say, the data from

microphysics suggest (to simplify a very complex matter)? And if you do have a reason to think that the causes resemble the observations, then you already have an independent solution to the Humean argument, so it isn't the appeal to the swarm of particles itself that dissolves the problem.[7]

Having clarified the argument, we can now consider the case for the premises.

H1 is plausible because such deeply contingent matters as the cause of your experience seems *generally* to be outside the domain of a priori reasoning or insight. Even if, as philosophers these days accept, there are *some* deeply contingent *a priori* truths, what happens to be the cause of your experience isn't one of them. The causes of your experiences clearly *could* be quite different from the content of the experience, as when you put on a set of virtual reality goggles or enjoy a vivid daydream. What a priori reason could you have for thinking that this is not the case? Perhaps you remember that the one time you tried on a pair, you then took them off. That's a good reason to think they're not on still, but that's not *an a priori* reason.

H2 is plausible due to issues of circularity. The idea is that any a posteriori or empirical evidence itself assumes, because it is based on experience, that experience reveals the nature of its causes (this is the Reliability of Experience principle from above, analogous to the Uniformity of Nature). Crucially, H2 (like H1) is about your *experiences in general*, rather than about some particular experience. One might plausibly check the cause of one's visual experience of the table by consulting one's tactile experience (running one's hands around it to confirm that it is rectangular, for example), or by speaking to the manufacturer of the table. But how do you check the causes of all of your experiences in general? To check them by appeal to some experience—that is, a posteriori—is to appeal to an experience, the subject of the original question about experiences in general. In the context of an investigation into the causes of experiences *in general*, one cannot take for granted, it seems, that any particular experience's cause resembles it. But then, how could some experience bear on the question of whether experiences resemble their causes? It is not as if you can pop out of your own head and experience a correlation between some experience's content and its cause. You are trapped within your mind's capacity to experience.

The inference from H4 to H5 is based on the idea that knowing what things there are in the external world requires having some reason to think that it resembles your sensory impressions. This does not require as a general rule that all knowledge requires having reasons, but only in the case of the causal origins of experiences. It is perhaps particularly plausible in this sort of case, because discovering the causal origins of things is exactly the kind of issue that investigation is for, and investigation is the process of

gathering evidence, or reasons. This is not like knowledge of a self-evident truth, or a truth about your own mental state, which one might argue is non-inferential and thus requires no reason at all.

All of the above justifications for premises are of course discussable. Maybe by consulting our concepts ("cause," "resemble"), we can derive an a priori reason that refutes H1. Maybe by noticing a relation (such as explanatory or coherence relations) between just *the contents* of our experiences gives us a reason, based on those experiences, that refutes H2. Maybe there are reasons that are neither a priori nor posteriori (though it's hard to imagine what they would be), so H3 is false. Maybe there are kinds of knowledge that require no reason at all, and the causal origin of things somehow *does* count as this kind of knowledge (perhaps reflective equilibrium leads us to a concept of knowledge that has this feature). The devil will be in the details of such strategies, and here I do not aim to step on the devil's tail. Rather, my aim is to show how this argument compares with the Cartesian argument. And any of the above strategies for refuting the Humean argument would also work against the Cartesian argument. If there were an a priori or a posteriori (or some other) reason to think that the causes of your experiences resembled them, then that is also a reason to think you are not in a skeptical scenario. For, in any such scenario, the causes of your experiences *do not* resemble them. So, C1 is false. Likewise, C1 is false if there is a kind of knowledge that does not require having reasons, and we know in that way what the causes of our experiences are (namely, not demonic ideas). So we can already and easily see one important relation between the Humean and Cartesian arguments: solutions to the Humean problem will also solve the Cartesian problem. But does the same hold *vice versa*?

8.3 Some Popular Solutions to the Cartesian Argument Do Not Apply to the Humean Argument

Many different anti-skeptical strategies have emerged in the last few decades to counter the Cartesian skeptical argument, which again is this, with "C" affixed to the premises for "Cartesian":

C1. You don't know that you're not a victim of Descartes' demon (or some other skeptical scenario)
C2. If you don't know that you're not a victim of Descartes' demon, then you don't know that you have hands.
C3. You don't know that you have hands
C4. Generalizing, you don't know that any external objects (beyond your senses) exist.

8.3.1 Rejecting C1

Many ways of rejecting C1 do not constitute solutions to the Humean argument because the Humean argument makes no use of skeptical scenarios, aside from the possibility, of course, that the causes of your experiences do not resemble them. Thus, it is not enough to rule out some specific way the causes of your experiences might be, but rather the anti-skeptic must (when pursuing this kind of strategy) make a *positive* case for how those causes *actually are*. This is a much tougher task.

Strategies that target C1 posit that you *do* know that you are not a victim of Descartes' demon or in some other skeptical scenario. "Some other skeptical scenario" can be important here, because some strategies target *only certain specific such scenarios*. For example, Hilary Putnam (1981) famously argued that you can know, a priori, that you are not a brain in a vat. Your words "brain in a vat" refer to the objects you are causally in contact with in such a way as to make "I am a brain in a vat" false whenever you utter it. But as is now widely known, this does not apply to a scenario in which you were only recently envatted, because your words "I am a brain in a vat" would mean something different, and potentially true, if until recently you were in causal contact with the real world. So, Putnam's strategy applies only to scenarios in which you have always been a brain in a vat.[8]

A similar remark applies to strategies that target another popular skeptical scenario, the dreaming scenario. In that scenario, you are currently dreaming. Some, as early as Descartes, noted that most dreams are not as neatly coherent as the present experience (assuming you are not reading this in a dream, dear reader). And Ernest Sosa (2007) has argued that there are no beliefs in dreams, so you have no beliefs in dreams, and that therefore the belief that you are not dreaming must be true.[9] But this applies only to dreaming scenarios.

Such responses to Cartesian skepticism are focused on specific skeptical scenarios. But the Humean argument makes no appeal to any skeptical scenario, let alone some specific one. So although these strategies may refute some versions of the Cartesian argument, they do not tell against the Humean argument.

Some approaches to C1 have the potential to apply to the Humean argument, but only if supplemented with more specific claims that make a positive case about what the causes of perception *are* (rather than merely what they are not). For example, some philosophers, as early as Russell (1912), have argued that you can know that you are not in some skeptical scenario because there is a simpler explanation of your sensory experiences. Vogel (1990) has argued that the explanation of your experiences according to which you are a brain in a vat is necessarily more complex than the

explanation according to which things are roughly as they seem. This is oversimplifying things, but we can leave the fascinating details aside and still appreciate that an additional claim must be established in order for this to apply to the Humean argument. Since the Humean argument does not appeal to any particular skeptical scenario, it is not enough to show that some skeptical hypotheses are inferior explanations to the hypothesis that things are roughly as they seem. That is, showing that one explanation (that a table is causing your perception) is better than another (that you are a brain in a vat being stimulated to have an experience of a table) is not yet a reason to think that the better explanation is true. What if some other, further available explanation is better? Then you lack a reason to believe either one of the first two. So it has to be shown that the *best* explanation is that the causes of your experiences resemble them. Otherwise, how could explanatory considerations bear on H1?[10]

Maybe a case could be made that the best or simplest explanation of your perceptions is that they are caused by things that resemble them—again, my aim here is not to refute any particular anti-skeptical claims. Rather, my point is that any such claim, if it is to work against the Humean skeptical argument, must go beyond merely showing that some skeptical hypothesis is an inferior explanation, which is all that is needed to refute the Cartesian argument. Solving the Humean problem requires a step further than solving the Cartesian one.

8.3.2 Rejecting C2

Another kind of response to the Cartesian skeptical argument targets C2. This involves appealing to some relation between knowledge about skeptical scenarios and ordinary knowledge about what things there are in the world. The Humean argument depends on no such connection, so we should expect that rejections of C2 will not always or generally apply to the Humean argument. And this is indeed what we find. Perhaps the two most prominent such strategies these days are denials of closure and veridicalism.

Deniers of closure such as Dretske (1970, 2005) and Nozick (1981) hold that one can know that there are hands (and other such ordinary things) even when one doesn't know whether one is in some skeptical scenario. They argue for this on the basis of epistemological principles. To take Dretske as an example, the idea is that one can know something without knowing any of its "heavyweight" implications. A heavyweight implication of something, p, is something that is entailed by p but cannot be seen to be true (2005, 16). For example, you can see that the bottle has red wine in it, but you cannot *see* that the bottle does not have red-colored water in it. And yet, that it is wine entails that it is not red-colored water. Still,

according to Dretske, you can know that it is wine, without knowing that it not red-colored water. Likewise, you can see that you have hands, but you cannot *see* that you are not tricked by Descartes' demon, who causes you to have this experience, thereby tricking you into thinking that you have hands. Still, you can know that you have hands, without knowing that you are not deceived by a demon. So, C2 is false.

Such denials of closure, however, don't translate into a solution to the Humean problem. For, they do not specify what one's reason is for thinking that the causes of one's experiences resemble them. Which of H1 or H2 is false, on this view? And if neither is false, then what reason does denying closure provide for rejecting the inference from H4 to H5? You cannot *see* that the causes of your experiences resemble them, because being a cause of an experience is not the same property as being a content, or similar to a content, of an experience.

Perhaps there is a similar strategy that does apply to the Humean argument. Suppose we say that your reason for thinking that the cause of your hand experience resembles the experience is simply that it looks like this is so. That is, the experience makes it look like what causes it is something resembling a hand-experience. And, perhaps, this gives you some *prima facie* justification to believe that there is a hand.[11] This need not require that you first or antecedently have a reason for thinking that the cause of your experience is not, say, a demonic idea instead. My aim is not to refute such a strategy.[12] Rather, it is to point out that one must appeal to the view that you can just *see* that the cause of your experience of a hand resembles it, and this is an additional burden beyond merely denying closure. It is plausible, on the face of it, that you can see that the bottle is full of red wine. But it is a further step to hold that you can see that what causes your perception of the bottle full of red wine is *something that resembles a bottle full of red wine*. Some, for example, a kind of disjunctivist, might hold just this view.[13] But this is to go further than denying closure, which itself rejects C2 but not any of the Humean argument's premises.[14]

An altogether different strategy for rejecting C2 is by appeal to a metaphysical, rather than epistemological principle. According to a "veridicalist" view, even if one in fact is in a skeptical scenario such as Descartes' demon, it can still be true that *there are hands*. If you are a demon victim, then hands turn out to be demonic ideas. If you are a brain in a vat, then your hands turn out to be digital simulations. But in either case, *there are hands*. So, you can know that there are hands even if you don't know that you are not in such a scenario. A recent example of this view is Chalmers (2018). All it takes to know that you have hands, aside from having the requisite experience, is to know that they interact causally with your observations and other such objects (like tables, light bulbs, and

squirrels) in roughly the way we associate with hands. Without getting into the details of such a view, it is clear that it rejects C2.

However, veridicalism (like simple denials of closure) leaves untouched the idea that we don't know what the causes of our experiences are. According to veridicalism, if you are a demon victim, then this table is merely a demonic idea. If you are a brain in a vat, then this table is a digitally realized computer state on the machine emitting inputs into your brain. If you are dreaming, then this table is an idea in your own mind. Clearly, if you don't know whether you are in those scenarios, then you don't know *what* the table is, because the table is a drastically different thing (an idea? A computer state?) in each of those scenarios. As I've pointed out elsewhere, veridicalism takes us from the claim that you don't know whether there is a table (because you might be a demon victim) to the claim that you don't know whether the table is a mere idea (because you might be a demon victim).[15] You clearly *still* have no reason to think that the experience of a table resembles its cause, because you don't know what the cause is (at least in one important sense of "what" it is, for example, whether it is a mere idea). So H1 and H2 remain untouched. One might think that, instead, veridicalism trips up the inference from H5 (the conclusion that you don't know that the causes of your experiences resemble them) to any gnarly skeptical result. Above, I stated that if H5 is true, then you don't know much about the external world. And the veridicalist might insist that you *do* know much: you know that there are tables, hands, and so on. But what does this knowledge amount to? I've argued elsewhere that such thin knowledge of what there is, when you remain ignorant of what things are, is no improvement over the Cartesian argument's conclusion.[16] Though I lack space to rehash this here, note that, even if I'm wrong about this, veridicalism of this sort would also refute the Cartesian argument (since C2 is false on this view), so we still won't have a case of an objection to the Humean argument that fails to apply to the Cartesian argument.

8.3.3 Other Strategies

There are other anti-Cartesian strategies, of course. And some of them arguably would address the Humean problem as well. For example, if in fact a real, physical table is causing your table experience, then you are having a veridical experience. And some philosophers argue that, in that case, you possess knowledge that there is a table there, which causes your experience. And in a skeptical scenario, in which you have some kind of experience of a table while the table is not there, you lack this knowledge. This sort of disjunctivism is meant to address one of C1 and C2 (though it is not always specified which one).[17] And, arguably, this would refute H2 as well, since, as long as you are not actually in a skeptical scenario,

you know that a table caused your table experience. This is an example of a solution to the Cartesian argument that can apply to the Humean argument as well. And above I suggested that some solutions to the Humean argument also apply to the Cartesian argument. So, I am not suggesting that *all* solutions to the Cartesian argument fail to apply to the Humean argument. Rather, many of them do, including prominent ones in the literature. What the anti-Cartesian strategies that fail to be anti-Humean strategies have in common is our next question, and one which will help to draw conclusions about the significance of the two sorts of skepticism.

8.4 What To Conclude

We have seen in the previous sections that although solutions to Humean skepticism also solve Cartesian skepticism, many popular solutions to Cartesian skepticism fail to address Humean skepticism. This suggests that the Humean argument presents a more difficult challenge. But it is also a deeper problem, one that cuts more directly to the chase. Granted, *some* solutions to the Cartesian problem also solve the Humean problem, as we've seen. So the key is to see why that is.

Anti-Cartesian strategies that fail to refute the Humean problem target either something specific about a skeptical scenario or the relation between such scenarios and ordinary propositions. Neither of these is involved in the Humean argument. Because the Humean argument explicitly and directly involves the causes of our experiences, it gets to the heart of the problem of the external world, or the world beyond appearances, regardless of how these are related to what we count as "ordinary" beliefs. Which skeptical scenarios are implausible, and even what counts as knowledge, does not directly address the problem of the external world, but takes a circuitous route: "the world could be this other way, so you don't know what way it actually is" rather than, more directly, "how do you know how the world actually is?"

Descartes' own solution, what Hume called the "unexpected circuit" of appealing to a non-deceiving God, would of course address the Humean problem as well: our a priori reason to think that the causes of our experiences resemble them is our a priori reason to think we are not being deceived (so H1 is false). This should not be surprising, on reflection. The skeptical scenarios featured in what we today call "Cartesian" arguments are mere heuristics Descartes used to make a point—one that would be accessible even to non-specialist readers of the *Meditations*—and the point ultimately was about the world beyond our senses, and how we can know about it. The skeptical scenarios are whacky ways the world out there could be, consistently with our experiences being just as they are,

so they bring attention to the problem of bridging the gap between our experiences and the world beyond them. Descartes mentions the violence such scenarios do to our ordinary beliefs or the way we ordinarily assume the world to be ("the heavens, the earth, colours, figures, sound, and all other external things"), in order to illustrate why this should matter. That is, while the skeptical scenarios illustrate that the world could be different from how it is presented in experience, our ordinary beliefs illustrate all that is at stake in this so that we take the problem seriously (of course, for those who are so deeply engrained in their current commonsense conception of the world, this has the opposite effect).

Hume seems to have trusted his audience more than Descartes did in the *Meditations*, though he also alluded to scenarios in which the causes of our experiences are "the energy of the mind itself, or … the suggestion of some invisible and unknown spirit, or … some other cause still more unknown to us" (see above). That is, he trusted his audience to be willing and able to confront the problem head-on, even without such heuristics as skeptical scenarios: how do we know that the causes of our experiences resemble them? Which is to ask, simply: What reason do we have to think that the external world is one way rather than another? As a result of his more direct approach, an argument based on Hume's text proves more difficult to address, since strategies that aim at superficial aspects of Descartes' heuristics, the merely illustrative scenarios and their relation to ordinary beliefs, can still fail to address the heart of the problem.

Notes

1 There are variations of the Cartesian argument, most notably ones involving an "underdetermination" principle. These still revolve around the relative merits of some skeptical scenarios, so much of what I say about C1–C4 applies to those variations as well. See Pritchard (2015, Ch. 2) for a discussion of the relation between these arguments.

2 Salmon (1967) contains a classic formulation of Hume's (or rather a Humean) problem of induction. See Lange (2011) for a more recent and excellent discussion.

3 Two recent and enlightening discussions of Hume's external world skepticism are Qu (2018, section 2) and Ainslie (2015, section 7.7). My own take on Hume's skepticism is Avnur (2015).

4 This impossible feat is perhaps what John McDowell meant by a "sideways-on understanding of our own thinking" (McDowell 1994, 35).

5 Wright prefers "There is an External World" as the bridge principle supporting an ampliative inference from perception to the external world, but I find this unattractive because, even in the case of Descartes' demon or the brain in a vat, *there is an external world*. It's just that, in those cases, the external world

is very different from what we take it to be, and from what experience seems to reveal.

6 Berkeley famously claimed that "an idea can be like nothing but an idea" (Berkeley 1948–1957: 8) (this is his so-called likeness principle). Hume seems to be somewhat friendly to this principle, particularly in the *Enquiry*. I will leave this, and Hume's flirtation with idealism, aside for the most part.

7 I have just appealed to the plausibility of two ideas: that a swarm of particles arranged table-wise resembles your perception of a table, and that the claim that there is such a swarm out there beyond your mind is an external world claim of the sort targeted by the Humean argument in the first place. But one might not share my sense of plausibility about this. Still, if you could have a reason to think that there is a swarm of particles there, causing your perception, then presumably you can have a reason to think that you are not, say, deceived by Descartes' demon, and presumably you can know that you are not so deceived on that basis. If you know that there is a swarm of particles there, you know that you are not deceived by a demon. So, if the scientific image of the world dissolves the Humean problem, it also dissolves the Cartesian problem. Since this way out of the Humean problem gets us out of the Cartesian problem as well, it is not a *unique* defect of the Humean argument. My aim is to show that the problem presented by the Humean argument is more difficult to solve than the one presented by the Cartesian argument. It is compatible with this that some solutions to the former are also solutions to the latter.

8 See Pritchard and Ranallli (2016) for a discussion of Putnam's argument including this limitation of it.

9 See Brown (2009) for discussion.

10 One might think that rather than applying to H1 by providing an a priori reason, appeals to explanatory simplicity apply to H2 by showing that we have an empirical reason. This would be to categorize an inference to the best explanation as a posteriori because such inferences involve the data of one's experiences. I take no stand on that here.

11 This is the view of the so-called dogmatists, such as Pryor (2000).

12 Literature against dogmatism Wright (2007) and White (2006).

13 Pritchard (2015) is one recent example.

14 Indeed, such a strategy is something like what Hume begins his discussion with, a sort of naïve realist view according to which what you see are the causes or external objects themselves. The "slightest philosophy," says Hume, refutes this view, since our experiences of an object can change while, presumably, the object stays the same.

15 Avnur (2024).

16 Avnur (2024).

17 See McDowell (1994) for a classic formulation, and Pritchard (2015) for a more recent one. Pritchard has a subtle, Wittgesntein-inspired view about propositions such as <I am not massively deceived> which makes C2 false. His disjunctivism is used to address a different skeptical puzzle, based on an "underdetermination" principle, whose relation to what I'm calling the Humean argument is

unclear to me (and Pritchard was not aiming to establish any such relation). So, I leave the details of Pritchard's approach aside.

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Part V

Hinge Epistemology

9 Humean Skepticism and Entitlement

Santiago Echeverri

Many philosophers have found in Hume's skeptical doubts concerning the operations of the understanding the roots of the problem of induction. Others have extracted from those doubts the materials for a skeptical argument that generalizes from induction to other domains, like our beliefs in the external world, other minds, and the past. While the problem of induction has featured prominently in philosophy of science, the skeptical argument has motivated the development of anti-skeptical strategies that can handle Humean skepticism in its full generality. This chapter is a contribution to the latter program.

The chapter falls into five sections. Section 9.1 offers a novel reconstruction of Humean skepticism. I identify several principles that enable that argument to reach a radical skeptical conclusion and compare its main steps with Hume's own doubts about 'reasonings' concerning matters of fact. Section 9.2 presents a classical interpretation of Hume's 'naturalist response' and explains why it does not avoid the skeptical conclusion. Section 9.3 offers an interpretation of Crispin Wright's entitlement theory as an attempt at avoiding the skeptical conclusion while retaining the key features of the classical, naturalist response. Section 9.4 suggests that entitlement theory relies on the truth of deeply contingent propositions that are not a priori rational, and that it does not manage to redefine the concept of epistemic rationality while offering an effective anti-skeptical response. Section 9.5 suggests that a better response to Humean skepticism might benefit from more recent, non-classical readings of Hume's positive views on induction.

9.1 Humean Skepticism

When contemporary philosophers engage with classical philosophers, they often overlook some assumptions and commitments that shaped the original claims and arguments. As a result, contemporary philosophers have

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created fictional characters like the Cartesian skeptic about the external world (Stroud 1984), the Wittgensteinian skeptic about rules and private language (Kripke 1982), and the Humean skeptic about induction, the external world, other minds, and the past (Coliva 2015; Greco 2000; Wright 1985, 2004, 2014). Our topic is the Humean skeptic and his argument for Humean skepticism. In deference to Hume scholars, I will refer to that fictional character as 'Hume*.'

Before we get started, let me mention two salient differences between Hume* and Hume. First, Hume* relies on Hume's ideas to formulate a radical skeptical argument. By contrast, Hume insisted that only moderate forms of skepticism could be beneficial to our epistemic conduct (EHU 12). Second, Hume did not present his doubts concerning the operations of the understanding as a paradox but as the conclusion of an investigation into the nature of human 'reasonings' concerning matters of fact. Therefore, Hume's goal was not to uncover a contradiction in our pre-theoretical commitments but to oppose prevalent, rationalist views of how humans come to discover matters of fact (EHU 4).

Those discrepancies notwithstanding, the study of paradoxes provides an excellent method to discover deep tensions or unclarities in the epistemic concepts that govern our epistemic practices. This point is particularly clear in Humean skepticism, which has played a central role in contemporary epistemology. My first goal is to offer a reconstruction of Humean skepticism that identifies the principles that are responsible for its generality. I will assume, as many contemporary philosophers do, that skepticism is not a live option. Given that assumption, the main philosophical task is to show where the skeptical argument goes wrong. We have two main options: either show that some step of the argument relies on a misunderstanding of our pre-theoretical commitments or reject some step by revising some of our pre-theoretical commitments. To keep the discussion manageable, I shall focus on Humean skepticism about enumerative induction (hereafter, 'induction').[1]

Skepticism about Induction

Premise 1. The reasons for *S*'s beliefs in inductive generalizations are underdetermined.

Premise 2. If the reasons for *S*'s beliefs in inductive generalizations are underdetermined, then *S*'s beliefs in inductive generalizations are epistemically rational only if *S* has independent reasons for those inductive generalizations.

Premise 3. *S* lacks independent reasons for inductive generalizations.

Conclusion. So, *S*'s beliefs in inductive generalizations are not epistemically rational.

Before we explain the premises, some clarificatory remarks are in order. '*S*' denotes any normal adult human. The argument targets 'epistemic rationality.' We will understand epistemic rationality as a *status* that attaches to a subject's beliefs. What it takes for a belief to be epistemically rational is a matter of some controversy, as will become clear later. Nevertheless, the following condition will do for our purposes: If *S*'s belief in *p* is epistemically rational, then *S*'s belief is appropriately based on sufficient epistemic reasons.

Premise 1 says that the reasons for *S*'s beliefs in inductive generalizations are underdetermined. Underdetermination is a relation between *S*'s reasons and pairs of contrary propositions (also known as 'alternatives'). Two propositions *p* and *q* are contraries just in case *p* and *q* cannot both be true. We can specify underdetermination with a principle:

> UNDERDETERMINATION. For any subject, *S*, and pairs of contrary propositions *p* and *q*: *S*'s reasons for believing *p* are underdetermined if and only if *S*'s reasons do not favor *p* over *q*.

Hume* holds that the reasons for *S*'s beliefs in inductive generalizations are underdetermined because *S*'s reasons do not favor inductive generalizations over many alternatives. We will proceed with an intuitive understanding of the favoring relation. Hume* thinks that the reasons for human beliefs in inductive generalizations consist of present and past observations alone. Suppose that Carlos has a belief in the proposition <The sun will rise tomorrow>. So, the reasons for Carlos' belief consist of his present and past observations: <The sun rose today>, <The sun rose yesterday>, and so on. For Hume*, Carlos' reasons do not favor the proposition <The sun will rise tomorrow> over many alternatives, like the proposition: <A meteorite will slam the Earth while Carlos is sleeping, producing an acid rain that will prevent the sun from rising tomorrow>. The reason is straightforward: the latter proposition is consistent with all of Carlos' observations so far. That is why the reasons for Carlos' belief in <The sun will rise tomorrow> are underdetermined. Let us refer to Premise 1 as the 'Underdetermination step.'[2]

Premise 2 says that, whenever the reasons for *S*'s belief in *p* are underdetermined, the rationality of *S*'s belief in *p* requires that *S* has *independent* reasons for *p*. Suppose that the source of *S*'s reasons is A. *S* has independent reasons for *p* just in case *S* has evidence from a source B other than A (A≠B). Hume* motivates Premise 2 by citing a general principle that seems to govern our everyday epistemic practices:

> INDEPENDENT REASONS. For any subject, *S*, and proposition *p*: if the reasons for *S*'s belief in *p* are underdetermined, then: If *S*'s belief in *p* is epistemically rational, *S* has independent reasons for *p*.

Imagine an archeologist who has been excavating the ruins of a hitherto unknown civilization. One of her most remarkable findings is a large monolith that seems to indicate the time of the day through the changing locations of its shadow during the day. Some weeks after the discovery, our archeologist sees the shadow of the monolith at some location. On that basis, she forms the belief in the proposition <It is 2:00 pm>. Suppose now that her belief is rational. It would be a mistake to assume that the rationality of that belief stems only from her observation of the location of the shadow. Indeed, (seeing) the location of the shadow does not seem to favor the proposition <It is 2:00 pm> over many alternatives. Since we have assumed that the target belief is rational, INDEPENDENT REASONS compels us to conclude that our archeologist has independent reasons that favor the proposition <It is 2:00 pm> over many alternatives. For example, our archeologist has independent evidence about the way that civilization divided time and about the principles that enable the monolith to indicate different periods of time as a function of the changing locations of the shadow.

Since INDEPENDENT REASONS holds without restriction, it applies to beliefs in inductive generalizations. If the reasons for Carlos' belief in <The sun will rise tomorrow> are underdetermined, then Carlos' belief in that proposition can be rational only if Carlos has independent reasons for <The sun will rise tomorrow>. There are different ways of fleshing out the independence requirement. After reading Hume's writings, Hume* comes up with a suggestion: one can only have independent reasons for inductive generalizations if one has independent reasons for the principle of the uniformity of nature (hereafter, UNIFORMITY):

> UNIFORMITY. Future events tend to be similar to past events.
> (EHU 4.30)[3]

If Carlos has independent reasons for UNIFORMITY, it is not unreasonable to think that Carlos' belief in <The sun will rise tomorrow> is rational. To be sure, Hume* is aware that UNIFORMITY might not suffice to yield that verdict. If Carlos' observations do not constitute a representative sample, his inductive beliefs won't qualify as rational. Nevertheless, Hume* insists that having independent reasons for UNIFORMITY is at least necessary to qualify Carlos' belief in <The sun will rise tomorrow> as rational. We shall dub Premise 2 the 'Independence step.'[4]

Premise 3 says that INDEPENDENT REASONS cannot be satisfied. Hume* argues by elimination. Sources of justification are of two types: empirical and a priori. Sadly, none of those sources provides Carlos with independent reasons for UNIFORMITY.

Let us start with empirical sources. UNIFORMITY specifies a similarity relation between past and future events. It seems impossible to acquire reasons for the obtaining of those similarity relations on the sole basis of *present* and *past* observations. Moreover, humans lack any empirical access to *future* events. The only remaining option is induction. However, Hume* had told us that inductive beliefs are based on present and past observations. Since the reasons provided by present and past observations are underdetermined, appealing to induction would launch us on an infinite regress.

Consider now a priori sources. Many contemporary philosophers accept that we can have a priori reasons to believe *some* contingent propositions (Kripke 1980; Kaplan 1977). Nevertheless, most of them deny that one can have a priori reasons to believe contingent propositions that describe *deep* features of the actual world (but see Hawthorne 2002). We can encapsulate this idea in a principle:

> RESTRICTED A PRIORI. For any subject, *S*, and proposition *p*: If *S* has a priori reasons for *p*, then *p* is not a deeply contingent proposition.

<The sun will rise tomorrow> and <Future events tend to be similar to past events> are deeply contingent propositions. Given RESTRICTED A PRIORI, Carlos lacks any a priori reasons for those propositions.

Suppose now that the empirical/a priori distinction is exhaustive. Then, Carlos lacks independent reasons for <The sun will raise tomorrow>. Let us call Premise 3 the 'Unavailability step.'[5]

'Skepticism about induction' is a valid argument. If the three premises are true, a skeptical conclusion follows. In our case, Carlos' belief in <The sun will rise tomorrow> is not epistemically rational. Since we could have chosen any other adult human and any other inductive proposition, the prior argument yields a radical skeptical conclusion.

Our reconstruction of skepticism about induction has a pay-off: it makes explicit the principles that explain the capacity of Humean skepticism to generalize from induction to many other domains. The argument starts from a structural deficiency that can potentially affect human epistemic reasons in other domains, such as the external world, other minds, and the past (Underdetermination step). After that, the argument identifies an epistemic requirement that arises whenever one faces that structural deficiency (Independence step). Finally, the argument employs a seemingly exhaustive dichotomy of epistemic sources to conclude that humans are unable, as a matter of principle, to meet the epistemic requirement (Unavailability step). So, Humean skepticism provides the materials for a piecemeal strategy to motivate a global skepticism about epistemic rationality.

9.2 The Classical Humean Response as a Concessive Response

Responses to Humean skepticism come in two types. 'Concessive responses' accept the Underdetermination and Independence steps and try to limit their damage. 'Non-concessive responses' reject at least one of the initial steps.

According to a classical reading, Hume was attracted to a concessive response. Although he did not formulate the prior argument, he would have accepted the three premises and the skeptical conclusion. He would have then tried to mitigate the damage by delineating a psychological explanation of how someone like Carlos forms beliefs in inductive generalizations. On this view, the principle of 'custom' leads Carlos to unavoidably project his observations of past events to unobserved future events (EHU 5.36–38). That projection always results in a belief, i.e., a doxastic state that does not depend on the will and is accompanied by a feeling or sentiment that makes it a 'vivid, lively, forcible, firm, and steady conception of an object' (EHU 5.40). Even if Carlos lacks reasons for his beliefs in inductive generalizations, the situation is not as bad as it might initially appear. Perhaps beliefs in inductive generalizations are *exempt* from epistemic evaluation (Strawson 1985). Or, since nature compels humans to form beliefs in inductive generalizations, humans can be *excused* for forming those beliefs (Avnur 2016). Still, both reactions concede that beliefs in inductive generalizations are not epistemically rational.

Although the classical reading has had supporters (Kemp Smith 1941; Passmore 1980; Wilson 1997), it faces a coherence challenge (Kemp Smith 1941). If one endorses the premises and conclusion of the skeptical argument, it is unclear whether and how one could rationally motivate the classical response, which relies on inductive generalizations about how people acquire—by custom—dispositions to project past and present observations into the future.[6] Still, the classical view remains popular in contemporary epistemology as a foil for other, anti-skeptical strategies. Indeed, many contemporary epistemologists have motivated their own anti-skeptical strategies as attempts at retaining some tenets of the classical response while trying to fare better from an anti-skeptical perspective. In the next section, I argue that Crispin Wright's entitlement theory is a concessive response that shares many features of the classical reading of Hume's response. Since I do not endorse the classical reading of Hume's response, I attribute it to Hume*.[7]

9.3 Entitlement Theory as a Hinge Epistemology

In *On Certainty*, Ludwig Wittgenstein suggests that our epistemic practices take place within a framework that makes those practices possible. He

famously compares the components of that framework to the hinges of a door:

> [T]he *questions* that we raise and our *doubts* depend on the fact that some propositions are exempt from doubt, are as it were like hinges on which those turn.
>
> That is to say, it belongs to the logic of our scientific investigations that certain things are *in deed* not doubted.
>
> But it isn't that the situation is like this: We just *can't* investigate everything, and for that reason we are forced to rest content with assumption. If I want the door to turn, the hinges must stay put.
>
> (Wittgenstein 1969, §§341–3)

There has been a heated debate on what qualifies as a hinge. Wittgenstein (1969, §135, §481) seems to construe UNIFORMITY as a hinge. If one endorses that reading, one can compare Hume* to Wittgenstein. Hume* accepts that UNIFORMITY is an assumption that is necessary in order to have rational beliefs in inductive generalizations. Since we lack independent reasons for UNIFORMITY, skepticism follows. However, our psychological constitution leads us to form steady beliefs in inductive generalizations. So, Hume* is a hinge epistemologist of sorts. Contrary to Hume*, however, Wittgenstein insists that we rely on UNIFORMITY, not because of our psychological constitution but because of our upbringing within a community. This approach is known as the 'naturalist reading' of *On Certainty* (Coliva 2015; Strawson 1985).

Entitlement theory tries to overcome the skeptical implications of the naturalist reading. To see why, we must first introduce Wright's views on the extension, nature, and roles of hinges.

Extension. Wright distinguishes two types of hinges. On the one hand, there are 'hinges' properly so-called, i.e., propositions that stay put across contexts. UNIFORMITY is an example of a hinge in that sense (Wright 2004, 170). Other propositions only stay put in specific contexts. Wright dubs them 'cornerstones.' They include the proposition that my eyes are functioning properly *now*, that the things I am *currently* perceiving have not been extensively disguised to conceal their true nature, and so on (Wright 2004, 190; 2014, 215). For simplicity, I will use 'hinge' for both hinges and cornerstones.

Nature. Hinges are propositions that feature as the contents of *sui generis* doxastic attitudes that Wright calls 'acceptances.' In an everyday sense, one can accept a proposition that one takes to be false, as when someone accepts that *p* in the context of a *reductio ad absurdum*. For Wright, if a subject accepts a hinge, she finds herself in a state that is incompatible with doubt concerning its content (Wright 2004, 193). The incompatibility

with doubt has two meanings. In a logical sense, a subject cannot simultaneously accept a hinge and doubt that hinge (Wright 2004, 181). In a modal sense, if a subject accepts a hinge, that subject cannot easily come to doubt that hinge (Wright 2004, 226). Hence, Wright's conception of acceptance is reminiscent of Hume's conception of belief (Section 9.2). Yet, Wright's conception of acceptance differs from contemporary views of belief that analyze the latter as constitutively controlled by evidence. Wright tries to capture those similarities and differences with the concept of trust. Although trust is not constitutively controlled by evidence, it has the same psychological consequences of (Humean) belief (Wright 2004, 182).

Roles. Many Wittgenstein scholars think of hinges as grammatical rules of language games and, therefore, as determinants of meaning (Moyal-Sharrock 2004; Schönbaumsfeld 2016). Wright (1985) has flirted with this idea. However, his subsequent work depicts hinges solely as epistemic rules. Hinges regulate all cognitive activities and the achievements that result from those activities. For example, they help determine whether a subject has evidence for a proposition, whether one may rely on an epistemic source to answer a question, and whether a type of epistemic source should take precedence over another (Wright 2014, 242–3). Departing from the letter of Wittgenstein's remarks, Wright often suggests that hinges underwrite not only *scientific* investigations but *any* cognitive achievement, including Carlos' belief in the proposition <The sun will rise tomorrow>.[8]

With this framework on the table, we can explain the essentials of entitlement theory. Wright thinks that our trust in hinges can be epistemically rational even though it is neither the upshot of a cognitive achievement nor based on evidence (Wright 1985, 452; 2004, 174–5; 2012, 475; 2014, 214). He coins the term 'entitlement' to denote this kind of unearned, non-evidential epistemic rationality. So, while Hume* has managed to identify the essential limits of earned, evidential rationality, he has mistakenly assumed that rationality is a status that one can only enjoy by having evidence (Wright 2004, 191).

Wright's response is both concessive and non-skeptical. He grants the Underdetermination and Independence steps but rejects the Unavailability step. If a subject can enjoy an independent entitlement to trust hinges, and those hinges underwrite any cognitive achievement, it is not true that independent reasons are unavailable. Those independent reasons need not be grounded in evidence. Since Wright accepts both the Underdetermination and Independence steps, he cannot derive those independent reasons from experience. So, Wright is compelled to derive them from an a priori source. However, Wright also accepts RESTRICTED A PRIORI. So, he does not try to find a priori reasons that speak to the truth of hinges. Instead, Wright identifies one or more epistemic goals of human subjects and tries to show that

a subject's trustings of hinges promote her attainment of those epistemic goals. Let us summarize these ideas in a simple anti-skeptical response:

Entitlement response
Premise 1. *S*'s trustings of hinges promote *S*'s attainment of *S*'s epistemic goals.
Premise 2. If *S*'s trustings of hinges promote *S*'s attainment of *S*'s epistemic goals, *S* has epistemic reasons to trust hinges.
Conclusion. So, *S* has epistemic reasons to trust hinges.

Wright defends Premise 1 with a series of a priori considerations to show that a subject's trustings of hinges promote her attainment of her epistemic goals. Each consideration gives rise to a different kind of entitlement: strategic entitlement, entitlement of cognitive project, entitlement of rational deliberation, and entitlement of substance. In each case, Wright tries to show that a subject's trustings of hinges promote different epistemic goals, such as maximizing the formation of true beliefs, answering a question in a competent manner, and engaging in rational deliberation.

Wright defends Premise 2 by revising a traditional view of epistemic and pragmatic reasons. According to the traditional view, epistemic reasons are considerations that *consist in* or are *grounded in* evidence that indicates the truth of the target proposition. To illustrate, if you have read a statistical report that says that it is more likely for smokers than for non-smokers to suffer from cancer, then you have an *epistemic reason* to believe that smoking causes cancer. By contrast, pragmatic reasons are reasons that are grounded in the subject's goals. If you want to work for a tobacco company that only hires people who do not believe that smoking causes cancer, this might give you a *pragmatic reason* to believe that smoking does not cause cancer (Harman 1999). If one endorses the traditional view, however, it follows that entitlement theory provides, at best, pragmatic reasons. Sadly, Humean skepticism can be avoided only if one can avail oneself of epistemic reasons for beliefs in inductive generalizations (Jenkins 2007; Moretti and Pedersen 2021; Pritchard 2005).

Wright (2012, 484; 2014, 239) thinks that we should get rid of the traditional view of epistemic and pragmatic reasons. In his picture, there is no special genre of pragmatic reasons that contrasts with epistemic reasons. One can derive epistemic reasons for *S*'s trusting hinge *h* if one can show that *S*'s trusting *h* promotes the attainment of *S*'s epistemic goals (Wright 2012, 484; 2014, 239). So, Wright invites us to think of the epistemic rationality of hinges on the model of a practical syllogism that makes an ineliminable reference to the subject's epistemic goals (Wright 2004, 182; 2014, 238). Promotion of a subject's epistemic goals can be all it takes for trust in a hinge to count as epistemically rational.

Before we move forward, I would like to alert the reader to an ambiguity in the entitlement response. In some passages, Wright seems to think that entitlements are relevant to characterize the epistemic rationality of *ordinary* subjects' trustings and beliefs (Wright 2004, 169–70). In other passages, he seems to think that entitlements are only relevant to characterize the epistemic rationality of *reflective* subjects' trustings and beliefs (Wright 2012, 466). By 'reflective subjects' I mean subjects who have engaged in an investigation of skepticism. This ambiguity will become important as we proceed.

In the next section, I criticize the two premises of the entitlement response. Along the way, I formulate a second version of the entitlement response and show that it fails as an anti-skeptical response.[9]

9.4 A Critique of Entitlement

In Section 9.4.1, I argue that Wright's defense of Premise 1 fails because one cannot show that a subject's trustings of hinges promote her attainment of her epistemic goals without relying on the truth of some deeply contingent propositions. And, by Wright's own admission, we lack a priori reasons to believe deeply contingent propositions. In Section 9.4.2, I argue that the dependence of trustings on a subject's goals, combined with that subject's lack of any evidence in favor of the relevant hinges, prevents entitlement theory from offering an epistemic response to Humean skepticism.

9.4.1 Against Premise 1

> Premise 1. *S*'s trustings of hinges promote *S*'s attainment of *S*'s epistemic goals.

What does it take for *S*'s trusting to promote the attainment of *S*' epistemic goals? A natural view appeals to objective probabilities: *S*'s trusting of hinge *h* promotes the attainment of *S*'s epistemic goal *e* only if *S*'s trusting of *h* increases the objective probability that *S* attains *e*.[10] Given this natural view, I will show that Wright's two key defenses of entitlement—strategic entitlement and entitlement of cognitive project—rely on the truth of deeply contingent propositions that are not grounded in a priori reasons.[11]

9.4.1.1 Strategic Entitlement

Strategic entitlement holds that placing trust in hinges is epistemically rational because that attitude promotes some epistemic goals, like forming

many true beliefs. Wright defends this claim with a game-theoretic argument.

Suppose that one's sole epistemic goal is to form many true beliefs. Then, trusting hinges is the dominant strategy in a game-theoretic sense. For any epistemic goal, a range of strategies $s_1, \ldots, s_n$ for attaining that goal, and possible scenarios $w_1, \ldots, w_k$, a strategy s_i $(1 \leq i \leq n)$ is a dominant strategy if and only if it does at least as well as every other strategy for any scenario and, for at least one scenario, it does better.[12] So, in a scenario where UNIFORMITY holds, Carlos will acquire many true beliefs in inductive generalizations by trusting UNIFORMITY and reasoning inductively. In all the other scenarios, Carlos will acquire a few true beliefs. If Carlos' sole epistemic goal is to form true beliefs, trusting UNIFORMITY and reasoning inductively is the dominant strategy.

	Nature is uniform	**Nature is haphazard**
Trust and inductive reasoning	Many true beliefs	Few true beliefs
No trust and inductive reasoning	Few true beliefs	Few true beliefs

Unfortunately, trusting UNIFORMITY and reasoning inductively can be the dominant strategy *and* not promote Carlos' epistemic goal of forming many true beliefs. That will happen if Carlos lives in a world where nature is haphazard (Wright 2004, 186). Interestingly, Wright does not see this concession as a decisive *objection*. Perhaps the game-theoretic argument still works if it is appropriately limited: If Carlos lives in a world where nature is uniform, trusting UNIFORMITY and reasoning inductively will promote Carlos' epistemic goal of forming many true beliefs. Alas, this assessment hides a deeper problem.

For Wright, the epistemic rationality of Carlos' trust in UNIFORMITY is conditional on Carlos being in a world where he gets many true beliefs by trusting UNIFORMITY. Since that only happens in a world where nature is uniform, it follows that the epistemic rationality of Carlos' trust in UNIFORMITY is conditional on Carlos being in a world where UNIFORMITY is true. So, the epistemic rationality of Carlos' trust in UNIFORMITY depends on the truth of a self-locating proposition: <In my world, UNIFORMITY is true>. If Carlos lacks a priori reasons for UNIFORMITY because UNIFORMITY is a deeply contingent proposition, it is unclear why Carlos could have a priori reasons for a self-locating proposition with UNIFORMITY as a constituent. The same point applies if we take a more theoretical perspective. It is unclear why a theorist who has followed the argument for Humean skepticism could have a priori reasons for the proposition <In Carlos' world, UNIFORMITY is true>. In both cases, the only remaining option is to get those reasons from experience. If Hume* is right, however,

our empirical reasons are underdetermined because they do not favor <In my world, UNIFORMITY is true> or <In Carlos' world, UNIFORMITY is true> over many alternatives. Therefore, strategic entitlement relies on the truth of a deeply contingent proposition that is neither a priori, nor empirically rational.

9.4.1.2 Entitlement of Cognitive Project

Entitlement of cognitive project purports to show that *S*'s trustings of hinges promote *S*'s competent execution of *S*'s cognitive projects. A cognitive project can be defined as an ordered pair of a question (Q) and a method one might competently employ to answer that question: <Q, M> (Wright 2012, 466). I will argue that a subject's trustings of hinges alone do not promote her competent execution of cognitive projects concerning the world, including inductive generalizations. Promotion requires the truth of some deeply contingent propositions. Given RESTRICTED A PRIORI, we lack a priori reasons to believe those deeply contingent propositions. Given the Underdetermination step, we lack empirical reasons to believe those deeply contingent propositions too. My argument relies on an example from everyday life that relies on a cornerstone. However, it should not be difficult to generalize that example to context-invariant hinges.

While visiting Mexico City, Sara has a craving for tacos. Sara's craving gives rise to a question: Where is a good taqueria? Happily, Sara has a method she can competently employ to answer that question: a map that Diego gave her before she traveled to Mexico City. To competently execute her cognitive project, Sara must trust several hinges, including ACCURACY:

> ACCURACY. My map accurately represents Mexico City.

Suppose now that Sara does not trust ACCURACY. Hence, Sara cannot answer her question by competently using her map. Nevertheless, this observation is insufficient to offer a good explanation of how Sara's trusting of ACCURACY promotes the attainment of her epistemic goal. Let us say that Sara's cognitive project is successful in a *strong sense* if and only if, by competently using her map, Sara manages to find a good taqueria in a non-lucky manner.[13] I will argue that Sara's trusting of ACCURACY is insufficient to account for the strong success of her cognitive project. More specifically, it is insufficient to explain how she manages to find a good taqueria in a non-lucky manner.

To get the required explanation, we need an additional assumption, namely, that Sara's map is indeed accurate. To see why, suppose that we are not allowed to make this additional assumption. Hence, our explanation should range over scenarios in which Sara retains the attitude of

trust in ACCURACY while she has a fake map fabricated by a prankster. In those scenarios, Sara's attitude of trust could at best explain why she started the search for a good taqueria in a certain direction. However, it is very unlikely that Sara could find a good taqueria by using a fake map fabricated by a prankster. And were Sara to find a good taqueria while using a fake map fabricated by a prankster, the success of Sara's project would be a matter of luck. In the prankster scenario, if we wanted to explain how Sara managed to attain her epistemic goal (i.e., find a good taqueria), it would be misleading to *merely* cite Sara's trust in ACCURACY. We should rather say that Sara's project was successful *in spite of* her placing trust in ACCURACY. In sum, if we understand the success of Sara's cognitive project in a strong sense, her attitude of trust only promotes the success of her project if the relevant hinge is true.

Unfortunately, <My map accurately represents Mexico City> is a deeply contingent proposition. Given RESTRICTED A PRIORI, we lack a priori reasons for deeply contingent propositions. Hence, if Wright wants to explain the success of a cognitive project, he must rely on the truth of a deeply contingent proposition that he lacks any a priori reason to rely on. Given the Underdetermination step, experience cannot justify that deeply contingent proposition either.[14]

Wright sometimes flirts with a weaker claim. On the alternative view, entitlements of cognitive project merely explain how we can avoid cognitive paralysis (Wright 2004, 191). This point is reminiscent of various passages from Hume, where he argues—against the Pyrrhonist—that 'all human life must perish, were his principles universally and steadily to prevail. All discourse, all action would immediately cease; and men remain in total lethargy, till the necessities of nature, unsatisfied, put an end to their miserable existence' (EHU 12.128). Trusting hinges enables us to *start* cognitive projects. Sara's trust in ACCURACY enables her to transition from feeling hungry to starting the search for a good taqueria with the help of her map (whether she ends up finding a good taqueria or not).[15]

Unfortunately, even this modest explanatory project relies on the truth of a deeply contingent proposition:

> PSYCHOLOGICAL NECESSITATION. For any subject, *S*, proposition *p*, and desire *F*: If a subject, *S*, trusts *h*, *S* wants to *F*, and *S* has the means to initiate a project to satisfy *F*, *S* will be set in motion to satisfy *F*.

Imagine a world where an evil demon has decided to manipulate Sara's brain. Each time Sara wants to know the location of a good taqueria and has the means to initiate a search for a taqueria, the evil demon blocks the brain processes responsible for transforming Sara's desire into the appropriate intention and that intention into appropriate motion. Similarly, each

time Sara wants to undertake more intellectual projects, like calculating the probability of rain for next week on behalf of a statistical model, the evil demon blocks the process responsible for transforming Sara's desire into an intention to make the calculation and that intention into calculating activity. Perhaps Sara does not live in that world. Nevertheless, if that world is metaphysically possible, PSYCHOLOGICAL NECESSITATION is a contingent proposition. Since that proposition describes deep features of the connection among Sara's desires, intentions, and actions, we are faced with a deeply contingent proposition. Given RESTRICTED A PRIORI, we lack a priori reasons for deeply contingent propositions. So, Wright must rely on empirical sources. Yet, by Wright's own admission, those empirical sources are underdetermined.

9.4.1.3 Summing Up

Strategic entitlement and entitlement of cognitive project provide cogent arguments only if they rely on the truth of deeply contingent propositions. If we lack a priori reasons for deeply contingent propositions, the two forms of entitlement fail to show that placing trust in hinges promotes a subject's epistemic goals. Perhaps there are other forms of entitlement, or other choices of epistemic goals, that are not prey to these objections. In my view, the whole project is hopeless. If one introduces forms of entitlement that do not promote truth-related goals, the result won't be very different from the skeptical conclusion, which says that adult humans lack *epistemic* reasons to believe inductive generalizations. If one introduces forms of entitlement that do promote truth-related goals concerning deeply contingent propositions, like inductive generalizations, we will implicitly rely on the truth of other, deeply contingent propositions.

9.4.2 Against Premise 2

> Premise 2. If *S*'s trustings of hinges promote *S*'s attainment of *S*'s epistemic goals, *S* has epistemic reasons to trust hinges.

For Wright, trusting *h* is incompatible with doubt about *h* (Section 9.3). Let us say that, whenever a doxastic attitude displays this form of incompatibility, it is a doxastically closed attitude.

Wright's view is puzzling. Consider the deeply contingent proposition <The number of planets in the universe is even>. In the absence of any evidence whatsoever, trusting that the number of planets in the universe is even seems to go too far. The traditional view of epistemic rationality offers a neat explanation of this intuition. One may bear a doxastically closed attitude toward that proposition only if one has sufficient evidence

for that proposition. Otherwise, it is not epistemically rational to trust that the number of planets in the universe is even.

Perhaps the problem will vanish if one construes epistemic entitlement on a 'welfare model.' On that model,

> an agent does not need to know her rights in order to have them. Indeed, she may have no conception of a right. And when she acts in ways that her rights mandate, her actions are in good standing even if she is unaware that they are so mandated or, though aware, unable to make out a cogent case that they are.
>
> (Wright 2014, 221–2)

So, the puzzlement articulated above rests on a misconception of how entitlements feature in a subject's mental life.

Unfortunately, this reply only exacerbates the original problem. Wright thinks that we need a response to Humean skepticism that enables a reflective subject to *rationally appreciate* that she is epistemically rational in believing propositions in the target domain and *claim* that belief in those propositions is epistemically rational (Wright 2004, 167; 2012, 466, 471). Entitlement theory does not put a reflective subject in any of those desirable positions.

Suppose that you find Wright's arguments in favor of Premise 1 persuasive. Still, those arguments are insufficient to generate in you any rational conviction in UNIFORMITY. This verdict is explained by a simple observation: none of Wright's arguments suffices to enable you to rationally enter a doxastically closed attitude toward UNIFORMITY.

Suppose that Carlos accepts Wright's strategic entitlement. When Carlos contemplates Wright's four-cell matrix, he concludes that trusting UNIFORMITY and reasoning inductively will give him many true beliefs in one scenario and few true beliefs in the other three scenarios. Sadly, that realization is not sufficient for Carlos to enter a doxastically closed attitude toward UNIFORMITY or, for that matter, to back up his doxastically closed attitude in <The sun will rise tomorrow>. Indeed, while contemplating the matrix, it will seem appropriate for Carlos to say: 'For all I know, I might be in a scenario where nature is haphazard and most of my inductive beliefs are false'. To get a doxastically closed attitude, Carlos would still need evidence that indicates that he is in a world where UNIFORMITY is true.

Wright thinks that the mediation of a want in the psychological architecture of trust is irrelevant to assess the resulting attitude as epistemically rational (Wright 2014, 238–9). That seems wrong. Imagine that Carlos is convinced that he lacks any evidence whatsoever for UNIFORMITY. Imagine also that Carlos has accepted Wright's arguments for Premise 1. If

Carlos wanted to use Wright's arguments to rationally appreciate that he is rational in trusting UNIFORMITY and claim that trusting UNIFORMITY is rational, the best he could do is put all these propositions together into a desperate practical syllogism:

Premise 1. I have no evidence whatsoever for UNIFORMITY.
Premise 2. Nevertheless, I want to get many true inductive beliefs and avoid cognitive paralysis.
Premise 3. In order to get many true inductive beliefs and avoid cognitive paralysis, I must trust UNIFORMITY.
Conclusion. So, I trust UNIFORMITY.

In the absence of evidence for hinges, practical syllogisms of this sort constitute the only rational routes available to a reflective subject. Nevertheless, these practical syllogisms strike most of us as epistemically irrational. That is probably why it is so hard to assess wishful thinking as epistemically rational. Practical syllogisms do not provide rational paths to enter a doxastically closed attitude toward UNIFORMITY. The only way of mitigating the irrationality of these syllogisms is to read their conclusions as expressing merely strategic attitudes. However, merely strategic attitudes are consistent with doubt about UNIFORMITY.

Wright has an answer to this problem. In his view, it would be a mistake to read entitlement theory as enabling someone to regulate her own doxastic attitudes. However, 'it is still appropriate to assess the attitudes in which we find ourselves entrenched by the very same standards of rationality that we would apply to those of our imaginary doxastic free agent' (Wright 2014, 228). So, entitlement theory merely provides an 'external' characterization of the epistemic rationality of a subject's trustings of hinges.

This response is unpersuasive. Ethologists can use decision-theoretic models to show that seals' foraging behavior maximizes expected utility and, therefore, that seals' foraging behavior is 'rational' in a broad sense. It would be a stretch to conclude, however, that seals' foraging behavior is rational in the same sense that features in the debate on Humean skepticism.

Let us distinguish cases where someone *has* epistemic reasons from cases where *there are* epistemic reasons. If successful, entitlement theory uncovers the *existence* of epistemic reasons to trust hinges that do not automatically qualify as reasons that—ordinary or reflective—subjects *have*. This reformulation suggests a second version of the entitlement response:

Entitlement response (II)
Premise 1. *S*'s trustings of hinges promote *S*'s attainment of *S*'s epistemic goals.

Premise 2*. If *S*'s trustings of hinges promote *S*'s attainment of *S*'s epistemic goals, there are epistemic reasons to trust hinges.
Conclusion. So, there are epistemic reasons to trust hinges.

This modified response is fully consistent with a skeptical appraisal of the human epistemic situation. Imagine that Oscar woke up believing that a certain theorem can be proved from a set of axioms Δ—provided that he has good reasons to accept an obscure rule of inference. Suppose further that believing that that theorem can be proved from Δ will promote Oscar's epistemic goals. Imagine now that an unknown mathematician has found good reasons to accept the obscure rule of inference that Oscar needs to prove the theorem from Δ. In that scenario, Oscar surely lacks epistemic reasons to believe that that theorem can be proved from Δ. Even if *there are* good reasons to accept the obscure rule of inference, the existence of those reasons is insufficient to assess Oscar's attitude toward the provability of the theorem as epistemically rational. After all, Oscar *does not have* any good reasons in favor of the obscure rule of inference.

Wright's considerations in favor of epistemic entitlement bear the same type of relation to subjects' everyday beliefs in inductive generalizations as the good reasons found by the unknown mathematician bear to Oscar's belief that a theorem can be proved from Δ. Even if Wright has managed to identify genuine epistemic reasons, those are not reasons that an ordinary subject has. Sadly, Wright has provided no indication of how a reflective subject could rationally take possession of those reasons. Hence, Wright's reasons are irrelevant to assessing the rationality of ordinary and reflective subjects' beliefs in inductive generalizations.

9.5 A Humean Way Forward

Entitlement theory promises what Hume* could not dream of: a response that is both concessive and non-skeptical. Entitlement theory is a chimera. If one grants the Underdetermination step, one thereby accepts that one lacks empirical reasons that speak to the truth of inductive generalizations. If one grants the Independence step, one thereby accepts a stringent requirement of INDEPENDENT REASONS. If one also grants RESTRICTED A PRIORI, one thereby accepts that epistemic rationality must satisfy an unsatisfiable requirement. If one wants to escape that predicament, three options are open: reject the Underdetermination step, reject the Independence step, or reject RESTRICTED A PRIORI. Any of these moves will make entitlement theory obsolete as an anti-skeptical strategy.

Interestingly, Hume's texts have the materials for a non-concessive response. One can read Hume as arguing for a restricted claim, namely, that (our most basic) inductive beliefs are not the result of reasoning.

That leaves open the possibility that (our most basic) inductive beliefs result from more primitive, intuitive or animal processes (EHU 5.45; T 1.4.2.9). If those primitive processes can be sources of a-rational justification, then (our most basic) inductive beliefs are not within the purview of the Underdetermination and Independence steps. Perhaps (our most basic) inductive beliefs do not withstand rational scrutiny because they are rationally underdetermined. However, there is an a-rational level where they are not underdetermined.

> Here, then, is a kind of pre-established harmony between the course of nature and the succession of our ideas; and though the powers and forces, by which the former is governed, be wholly unknown to us; yet our thoughts and conceptions have still, we find, gone on in the same train with the other works of nature. Custom is that principle, by which this correspondence has been effected; so necessary to the subsistence of our species, and the regulation of our conduct, in every circumstance and occurrence of human life.
>
> (EHU 5.44)

If the powers underlying human custom are the same as the powers underlying the course of nature, then our current inductive dispositions can favor our natural expectations about the course of nature over alternatives. Indeed, having our current inductive dispositions will increase the objective probability that our expectations will come out true over alternatives.

Some might complain that this view is unavailable, for it requires speculation about final causes. If Humean skepticism is a paradoxical argument, however, that objection loses much of its force. Paradoxical arguments cite only our putative pre-theoretical commitments to show that our beliefs in inductive generalizations cannot have some positive epistemic status. If our pre-theoretical commitments do not rule out the possibility that our inductive dispositions march in step with the course of nature, our pre-theoretical commitments do not stop us from endorsing Hume's suggestion.

Alternatively, Hume could accept that there are rational processes responsible for inductive beliefs that are underdetermined. He might insist, however, that rational inductive beliefs are not subject to the requirement imposed by INDEPENDENT REASONS. Consider Hume's example of a billiard ball that is supposed to cause another billiard ball to move. Hume rejects the hypothesis that the two moving balls are connected by an a priori relation of ideas by rehearsing considerations that come close to UNDERDETERMINATION:

> May I not conceive, that a hundred different events might as well follow from that cause? May not both these balls remain at absolute rest? May not the first ball return in a straight line, or leap off from the second in any line or direction? All these suppositions are consistent and conceivable. Why then should we give the preference to one, which is no more consistent or conceivable than the rest? All our reasonings *a priori* will never be able to show us any foundation for this preference.
>
> (EHU 4.25)

One can read Hume as claiming that only a priori reasonings about necessary truths are subject to an unrestricted form of UNDERDETERMINATION. By contrast, rational beliefs in inductive generalizations are subject to a restricted form of UNDERDETERMINATION that does not range over *all* the contraries of expected generalizations. Hence, beliefs in inductive generalizations can be epistemically rational in a way that is consistent with (relative) underdetermination.

I suspect that these two threads complement one another. While our most primitive inductive beliefs are not underdetermined, our most sophisticated inductive beliefs are rational despite their (relative) underdetermination. Of course, it remains to be seen whether this solution is compatible with Hume's own assumptions and commitments. Even if the answer is negative, the exercise will help us improve our understanding of the relations among reasoning, reasons, and epistemic justification.[16]

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Notes

1 Earlier attempts at reconstructing Humean skepticism can be found in Greco (2000), Wright (1985, 2004, 2014), and Coliva (2015). Some key elements of this type of argument can be found in Pryor (2000), Stroud (1984), and Vogel (2004).

2 Hume's doubts concerning the operations of the understanding do not start from an Underdetermination step, but from a contrast between relations of ideas and matters of fact. Hume emphasizes that matters of fact enable humans

to go beyond the testimony of the senses and the records of memory. He also points out that matters of fact are less certain and evident than relations of ideas. These two features seem sufficient to awake Hume's curiosity; he then starts an inquiry into how humans discover matters of fact. Assuming that the discovery of matters of fact is grounded in the relation of cause and effect, Hume proceeds to argue that we do not discover those relations of cause and effect by engaging in any form of reasoning (EHU 4.12).

3 Hume does not introduce UNIFORMITY to satisfy INDEPENDENT REASONS. His main goal is to explain how, given our lack of access to the secret powers of objects, a process of reasoning could connect present and past observations with future courses of events.

4 Hume*'s Independence step reminds us of a non-circularity requirement that features in Hume's discussion. Nevertheless, Hume does not motivate his circularity worries by pointing to the underdetermination of our reasons for inductive beliefs. Instead, circularity emerges as a problem in his attempt at understanding in what sense, if any, beliefs about matters of fact are the product of a probable argument (EHU 4.30). Suppose that 'reasonings' about matters of fact are founded in the relation of cause and effect. Suppose also that we discover those relations by experience. For Hume, experience necessarily relies on UNIFORMITY. If we try to prove UNIFORMITY via a probable argument, we go in a circle.

5 The Unavailability step is inspired by Hume's distinction between relations of ideas and matters of fact (EHU 4), also known as 'Hume's fork.' There are several differences, though. Hume seems to think that reasonings about relations of ideas always yield infallible and indefeasible conclusions. By contrast, Hume* does not assume that a priori sources always yield infallible and indefeasible conclusions. Hume seems to think that one can only reason a priori about necessary truths. Hume* accepts that we can have a priori reasons for *some* superficially contingent truths.

6 Qu (2019) offers a useful overview of various attempts at solving this problem.

7 Qu (2018) thinks that Hume's anti-skeptical remarks in EHU 12 are congenial to Wright's entitlement theory. Qu's interpretation is consistent with my claim that entitlement theory is a reaction to a classical reading of Hume.

8 In more recent work, Wright (2014) restricts the operation of hinges to 'reflective' epistemic practices.

9 Wright's approach is reminiscent of instrumentalist accounts of epistemic rationality (Wright 2012, 484), which invoke epistemic values to elucidate the force of evidential considerations. Wright (2014) insists, however, that his entitlement project is confined to the rationality of *trust*. Thus, Wright remains neutral on the question of whether the rational force of reasons for *belief* is grounded in some instrumental value. He also rejects pictures according to which the motivating power of evidence depends on the contingent goals of the subject.

10 Wright (2014, 239) describes entitlement as 'in the service of epistemic values—the maximizing of true and useful belief'. He also characterizes expected

epistemic utility as 'the expectation that we thereby enhance our chances of believing the truth and avoiding error' (2014, 241).

11 Williams (2012) argues that Wright's entitlements are viciously circular because they are contingent on human epistemic aims and values, and it is an empirical question what those epistemic aims and values are. My objection is different. Even if we take for granted Wright's epistemic aims and values, his defenses of entitlement must rely on the truth of deeply contingent propositions. Given RESTRICTED A PRIORI, we lack a priori reasons for those propositions.

12 This formulation is slightly modified from Moretti and Pedersen (2021, 9–10). Pedersen (2009) and Moretti (2021) argue that Wright's strategic entitlement fails if one introduces a second epistemic goal, namely, the goal of avoiding having false beliefs.

13 This reading is suggested by Wright's view of cognitive projects as projects defined by a method one might *competently* execute in order to answer a question. From a virtue-theoretic perspective, the concept of competence bears a constitutive relation to non-lucky success in a select class of favorable circumstances (Sosa 2007).

14 ACCURACY seems to be supported by the inductive generalization that fake maps are a rare exception, not the rule.

15 If one pursues the weak explanatory project, the resulting account will have trouble explaining how knowledge is possible, for knowledge involves an anti-luck condition. If what explains Sara's finding a true answer to her question is indifferent to the truth-conducive character of her method, the resulting explanation won't discriminate between lucky true answers and non-lucky true answers.

16 In Echeverri (2023), I argue that much of our knowledge of the external world might have a-rational albeit truth-conducive grounds.

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10 Hume and Wittgenstein on Naturalism and Scepticism

Duncan Pritchard

10.1 Strawson's Naturalistic Anti-Scepticism

Peter Strawson (1985) famously presented an intriguing response to radical scepticism along naturalistic lines that, he claimed, drew inspiration from both Hume and Wittgenstein. Consider this passage, where he summarizes his proposal:

> [*Hume and Wittgenstein*] have in common the view that our 'beliefs' in the existence of body and, to speak roughly, in the general reliability of induction are not grounded beliefs and at the same time are not open to serious doubt. They are […] outside our critical and rational competence in the sense that they define, or help to define, the area in which that competence is exercised. To attempt to confront the professional skeptical doubt with arguments in support of these beliefs is to show a total misunderstanding of the role they actually play in our belief-systems. The correct way with the professional skeptic is not to attempt to rebut it with argument, but to point out that it is idle, unreal, a pretense: and then the rebutting arguments will appear as equally idle; the reasons produced in those arguments to justify induction or belief in the existence of body are not, and do not become, *our* reasons for these beliefs; there is no such thing as *the reasons for which we hold* these beliefs. We simply cannot help accepting them as defining the areas within which the questions come up of what beliefs we should rationally hold on such-and-such a matter.
>
> (Strawson 1985, 21, *italics in original*)

The general line of argument is clear enough. According to Strawson, both Hume and Wittgenstein are concerned to show that some of our most fundamental commitments are in a certain sense non-optional, in that we are obliged, as a fact of nature, to have them. Accordingly, or so the anti-sceptical thought in question goes, the idea that all our commitments

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can be subjected to doubt *en masse* is based on a misunderstanding as in fact there are some basic commitments that cannot be doubted. That is, any attempt to doubt them will be 'idle' and anyone who proclaims that they doubt them, like the radical sceptic, is engaged in a 'pretense'. Relatedly, any attempt by a traditional anti-sceptic to justify these fundamental commitments is equally idle, as properly understood they are not commitments that are based on reasons but are rather the product of our natures.

If Strawson's naturalistic form of anti-scepticism were tenable, then it would have a dramatic effect on the sceptical problematic, as it would demonstrate that both the sceptic and the traditional anti-sceptic have simply misunderstood the difficulty at hand. Properly understood, our lack of justification for our basic commitments is not a cause for sceptical concern since they simply do not stand in need of such a justification. Unfortunately, however, this naturalistic line on radical scepticism is not compelling. The core problem that it faces is that it doesn't seem to be in any way essential to the problem of radical scepticism—at least in its contemporary, and most disturbing, form—that one is able to actually doubt all of one's commitments. The reason for this is that radical scepticism on this rendering is properly understood as a paradox rather than as a position—i.e., as exposing a deep tension in our ordinary ways of thinking about knowledge rather than as an intellectual stance that one can coherently occupy.

For example, the contemporary problem of radical scepticism is standardly motivated by pointing out that our ordinary ways of thinking about knowledge seem to require that in order for our everyday beliefs to genuinely count as knowledge it is essential that we are able to rule out the possibility that we are subject to scenarios that would undetectably generate massive falsity in our beliefs. And yet the very undetectability of these radical sceptical scenarios means that we lack any means of ruling them out. Hence, it seems that our everyday beliefs cannot amount to *bona fide* knowledge, even though our ordinary practices routinely ascribe such knowledge. We thus get the paradoxical tension at the heart of our ordinary thinking about knowledge.[1]

Radical scepticism as a position would involve embracing the claim that our everyday 'knowledge' is illusory. Such a stance would be made problematic by Strawson's anti-sceptical line since it would presumably entail that one actually doubts much of what one believes, something that Strawson is claiming is impossible. But radical scepticism as a paradox needn't involve endorsing any such claim. It would be enough for this form of radical scepticism to highlight that our ordinary ways of thinking about knowledge are shot through with paradox and leave the matter at that. In particular, notice that so construed there is nothing in radical scepticism

that would entail actual doubt of one's beliefs. Indeed, it is entirely consistent with such a rendering of radical scepticism that one cannot help but have certain kinds of commitments. The point would just be that our apparent knowledge has been problematized by the radical sceptical paradox.[2]

Indeed, if anything, discovering that one cannot help but retain one's fundamental commitments regardless of the fact that one's knowledge as a whole has been problematized in this way arguably makes the paradoxical nature of the situation worse rather than better. This is because it implies that one is obliged to a kind of 'bad faith' existence whereby one's commitments are not aligned with what one recognizes that they ought to be and there is nothing that one can do about that fact. The parallel with the paradoxical nature of free will is instructive in this regard. It is often noted that we can't help but regard ourselves as free agents; indeed, there is something deeply odd about the idea that one has thought long and hard about the issues and reached the conclusion that one lacks free will! And yet there is no temptation to conclude from the fact that we can't help but regard ourselves as free that this gains us any purchase at all on the paradoxical nature of free will. If one grants that it is paradoxical, then also granting that one cannot help but regard oneself as free only makes the situation more paradoxical rather than less due to the 'bad faith' nature of one's commitment to one's freedom.

I don't want to labour this critical point against Strawson's anti-scepticism, not least because it is a familiar charge against this proposal.[3] I'm more interested in how a philosopher of Strawson's evident capabilities missed this point. I will be suggesting that this is related to the way that he is reading Hume and Wittgenstein in this respect, and so this will be the focus of the rest of the chapter. In particular, I will be suggesting that Strawson misunderstands the relevant naturalistic elements in the work of these philosophers. Moreover, while Strawson does acknowledge some important differences between the anti-sceptical lines taken by Hume and Wittgenstein, he misses some even more important contrasts.

As we will see, while Hume does advance a naturalistic line in response to radical scepticism, it is not the formulation of radical scepticism as a paradox that we are familiar with in the contemporary debate that he is responding to. It is rather a kind of scepticism that is explicitly modelled as a position. This is why the Humean naturalistic line is arguably more effective against its sceptical target than Strawson's rendering of it. Even so, it's far from clear that Hume really does think that sceptical doubts are idle in the sense that Strawson sets out. Indeed, as we will see, Hume seems to hold that sceptical doubts can be entirely genuine, at least in the context of the study; it is just that they are in their nature unstable, as

they always collapse back into ordinary non-sceptical commitments before long once one leaves the study and re-engages with the world. Relatedly, Hume's 'response' to his sceptical target is itself a kind of sceptical solution to the problem, to such an extent that one could reasonably take Hume to be advancing a version of the sceptical position that he is on the face of it attacking.

The divergence between Wittgenstein's treatment of radical scepticism and Strawson's rendering of it is starker still. While it is plausible to regard Hume as proposing a form of anti-scepticism along broadly naturalistic lines (even if the sceptical target isn't quite as Strawson imagined), it is simply not part of Wittgenstein's treatment of radical scepticism to appeal to naturalism. This is not to deny that Wittgenstein does make some very Humean points about the non-optional nature of our most fundamental commitments, but the crux of the matter is that these naturalistic claims do not ultimately carry any anti-sceptical weight. What does carry the anti-sceptical weight for Wittgenstein is instead the diagnostic treatment of radical scepticism that he offers, whereby he shows that such scepticism incorporates a faulty picture about the structure of rational evaluation, a picture that is not in any way grounded in our ordinary rational practices. The upshot is that the putative paradox on display is shown to be illusory; there simply isn't any deep tension in our ordinary ways of thinking about knowledge as the radical sceptic proposes. The mistake made by traditional responses to radical scepticism is thus to uncritically accept this picture and attempt to resolve the problem from within it; the correct approach, in contrast, is to reject the picture that is generating the puzzle.

In setting out this feature of Wittgenstein's position we will also get a clearer sense of how Wittgenstein diverges from Hume in his treatment of our fundamental commitments. One key divergence is that Wittgenstein is emphatic that the arational fundamental commitments that we are obliged to have are not theoretical claims at all, but rather ordinary everyday items of mundane commonsense. This is in marked contrast to Hume in this regard. This also highlights one place where Strawson's reading of these figures goes awry. For while he recognizes that Wittgenstein has a different class of fundamental commitments in mind to that considered by Hume, he nonetheless holds that this class includes those advanced by Hume. As we will see, this is based on a misreading of Wittgenstein. This leads to a second important divergence between Hume and Wittgenstein, which is the extent to which these thinkers hold that we can genuinely succumb to sceptical doubts. Wittgenstein takes a stronger line than Hume in this regard, as he holds that scepticism doesn't even get a grip on the rarefied intellectual air of one's study.

10.2 Hume's Naturalistic Anti-Scepticism

One might think that Strawson is on solid ground in attributing a naturalistic response to radical scepticism to Hume. After all, Hume is notorious for arguing that ultimately our basic commitments are due to nature rather than reason and that this undermines the sceptical attempt to critique the rational basis of those commitments. That certainly sounds very much in keeping with what Strawson proposes. Strawson's main focus in his reading of Hume is the idea that our commitment to there being an external world is one of these basic commitments that are due to nature rather than reason. Accordingly, this will be our focus too. On the face of it, at least, Strawson's proposal aligns with what Hume says in this regard. Consider, for example, this famous passage:

> the sceptic still continues to reason and believe, even tho' he asserts, that he cannot defend his reason by reason; and by the same rule he must assent to the principle concerning the existence of body, tho' he cannot pretend by any arguments of philosophy to maintain its veracity. Nature has not left this to his choice, and has doubtless esteem'd it an affair of too great importance to be trusted to our uncertain reasonings and speculations. We may well ask, *What causes induce us to believe in the existence of body?* but 'tis in vain to ask, *Whether there be body or not?* That is a point, which we must take for granted in all our reasonings.
>
> (Hume [1739]/2000, §1.4.2.1)

Following Strawson's lead, we may reasonably take these remarks about the 'existence of body' to straightforwardly translate into claims about an external world in the contemporary meaning of the phrase. So construed, the point is clear: it is an illusion to suppose that a commitment to an external world is the product of reason and hence of a kind that it can be subject to sceptical doubt. As a product of our natures, it is rather something that we are obliged to take for granted. That sounds very much in keeping with what Strawson had in mind, as it appears to make sceptical doubts about the reality of an external world—and also for that matter traditional anti-sceptical arguments in support of our belief in an external world—rest on the faulty presupposition that the claim in play is in the realm of reason in the first place.

With the foregoing in mind, one might think that one can reasonably conclude, as Strawson does, that sceptical doubts on the Humean picture are simply idle in the sense that he articulates. There are certain remarks in Hume that suggest such an idea, such as this passage:

> Whoever has taken the pains to refute the cavils of this *total* scepticism has really disputed without an antagonist and endeavoured by arguments to establish a faculty which Nature has antecedently implanted in the mind and rendered unavoidable.
>
> (Hume [1739]/2000, §1.4.1.7)

Or consider the following remarks, where Hume makes the point that if our basic commitments were the product of reason then belief would 'infallibly destroy itself' by generating a total suspense of judgement. It is thus fortunate that they are not produced in this fashion:

> My intention then in displaying so carefully the arguments of that fantastic sect, is only to make the reader sensible of the truth of my hypothesis, *that all our reasonings concerning causes and effects are deriv'd from nothing but custom; and that belief is more properly an act of the sensitive, than of the cogitative part of our natures*. [...] I have prov'd, that [...] If belief [...] were a simple act of the thought, without any peculiar manner of conception, or the addition of a force and vivacity, it must infallibly destroy itself, and in every case terminate in a total suspence of judgment.
>
> (Hume [1739]/2000, §1.4.1.8)

So far so good for Strawson then. As is so often the case in philosophy, however, the devil lies in the details. We have already noted that Strawson's anti-scepticism seems guilty of a straightforward flaw, in that this naturalistic line on our basic commitments seems to only exacerbate the paradoxical situation that is highlighted by radical scepticism rather than offer any resolution to it. If Strawson is simply following Hume in this regard, however, then does that mean that Hume is making the same mistake? I think not. If it is true that Hume doesn't make an error of this kind, then that highlights an important difference between his anti-scepticism and the variety of anti-scepticism presented by Strawson.

In the passage just quoted Hume refers to radical scepticism as that 'fantastic sect'. What Hume is referring to here, crucially, is not the version of radical scepticism that we are familiar with in contemporary epistemology, whereby radical scepticism is to be construed as a paradox, but rather the very different form of radical scepticism offered by the Pyrrhonians. The crucial point for our purposes is that Pyrrhonian scepticism is meant to be an ethical stance and hence a lived philosophy. Radical scepticism on this construal consists in the application of sceptical techniques, or 'modes', that are designed to induce a maximal form of doubt (at least in the sense of leading to suspension of belief anyway). Since an ethical stance requires

one to have some commitments in order to function at all, the question facing the Pyrrhonian is how to circumscribe the scope of the doubt such that one can coherently live one's scepticism. There are various interpretations of the view in this regard, but it is generally agreed that the sceptical modes have application at least to one's theoretical commitments, where this would include a philosophical thesis about the existence of an external world, even if it cannot have application to the kind of spontaneous beliefs that are formed as a result of one's nature, as one when one feels cold when outside in the snow. In the former case, doubt (suspension of belief) is an available option and so can be the result of the application of the sceptical modes, while in the latter case, this is simply not an option, and hence, it would be idle to apply the sceptical modes.[4]

This is very important for understanding the point of Hume's naturalistic anti-scepticism, for when Hume argues that one's basic commitments about, say, the existence of the body are the result of nature rather than reason he is effectively arguing that even these apparently theoretical commitments are beyond the scope of the Pyrrhonian sceptical modes, just as one's natural doxastic response to being exposed to wintery conditions might be. So construed, Hume's naturalistic anti-scepticism simply doesn't make the mistake that Strawson's naturalistic anti-scepticism makes, as it isn't concerned with radical scepticism *qua* paradox at all but rather radical scepticism *qua* position, at least in the sense of being a lived, ethical stance. That is, while pointing out that one can't help but have certain basic theoretical commitments might offer one no purchase on dissolving the apparently paradoxical tension within our ordinary ways of thinking about knowledge, it does undermine a variety of sceptical doubt that by its own lights cannot have application to those commitments that are not the product of reason in the first place. Strawson's mistake is thus to take the Humean line, which has a sensible application with regard to a particular (Pyrrhonian) sceptical target, and try to simply repurpose it, without significant addition or alteration, to a very different sceptical quarry (radical scepticism *qua* paradox).

This is not the only aspect of Hume's naturalistic line on radical scepticism that sets it apart from Strawson's account, for there is also the further issue of Hume's more concessive approach to the sceptical puzzle. Strawson describes his anti-sceptical line in a blunt fashion as showing that sceptical doubts are idle, a pretence, with similar points applying to any attempt to offer a rational basis for one's basic commitments that excludes these doubts. Strawson offers instead an alternative way of thinking about the sceptical debate such that in a sanguine fashion, one simply ignores it and moves on to consider different philosophical questions where one's commitments do fall within the realm of reason as opposed to nature. We have noted that Hume seems broadly on board with this programme,

but, as before, once one drills down to the specifics important differences between Hume's variant of anti-sceptical naturalism and that offered by Strawson begin to emerge.

These differences are especially evident when one considers Hume's famous remarks about how scepticism can only gain a hold of one in the study but becomes idle once one re-enters ordinary life:

> Most fortunately it happens, that since reason is incapable of dispelling these clouds, nature herself suffices to that purpose, and cures me of this philosophical melancholy and delirium, either by relaxing this bent of mind, or by some avocation, and lively impression of my senses, which obliterate all these chimeras. I dine, I play a game of back-gammon, I converse, and am merry with my friends; and when after three or four hour's amusement, I wou'd return to these speculations, they appear so cold, and strain'd, and ridiculous, that I cannot find in my heart to enter into them any farther.
>
> (Hume [1739]/2000, §1.4.7.9)

This feature of Hume's position has been called his 'bisperspectivalism', in the sense that scepticism gains a grip in the study but not in the street.[5] Notice that this is very different to the more dismissive line on scepticism offered by Strawson, whereby sceptical doubts fail to gain any purchase on us anywhere. Hume's point seems to be rather different: not that sceptical doubts are always unreal, but rather that they are inevitably unstable, in that nature will eventually reassert itself and drive out the doubt once we slot ourselves back into day-to-day life.[6] This is not a minor difference between Hume and Strawson, as it reveals that Hume is far more sympathetic to scepticism than Strawson, even despite his rhetoric to the contrary.[7]

10.3 Wittgenstein's Non-Naturalistic Anti-Scepticism

Let us now turn to Wittgenstein and how he fits into the naturalistic anti-sceptical picture that Hume and Strawson belong to (in their different ways, as we have seen). Strawson's blending of Hume and Wittgenstein in this regard was innovative in part because of how it took seriously the distinctive line on rationality and scepticism that Wittgenstein (1969) offers in his final notebooks, published as *On Certainty* (=OC). Strawson is the first major figure to offer a sustained treatment of this work and, in particular, to recognize how the very late Wittgenstein was proposing a new line of argument that is not found in the *Philosophical Investigations* (Wittgenstein 1953). The general thought in play that caught Strawson's attention was the idea that there is a class of everyday certainties that

perform an essential framework role in our rational practices, such that they make possible rational evaluations. The idea is that in order to engage in rational evaluations one must have an overarching certainty in one's worldview, where this entails in turn a visceral certainty in the commonsense nodes of that worldview. As such, one's basic commitments cannot be themselves rationally evaluated and so are arational (and hence unknown). Following a metaphor employed by Wittgenstein (OC, §341–44), these fundamental arational certainties are known as 'hinge' commitments, in the sense that they are the hinges on which the practice of rational evaluation turns.[8]

In terms of their surface properties at least, there is some commonality between Wittgensteinian hinge commitments and the kind of basic commitments that Hume thought are the product of nature rather than reason. We have already noted that Wittgenstein maintained that our hinge commitments are essentially arational; it is simply a mistake, on the Wittgensteinian picture, to think of them as the kind of commitment that could be rationally grounded or subject to a rational practice like doubt in the way that applies to our other commitments. Indeed, he emphasizes that our hinge commitments not the product of rational processes but rather brute features of our mode of acting; as such, they are commitments that are 'primitive', 'animal', visceral (OC, §395, §475). Wittgenstein also held that our hinge commitments are non-optional, in the sense that to be a rational subject is to have hinge commitments. Importantly, however, our hinge commitments are not the product of our nature in the way that Hume was concerned, but rather the product of our socialization.

The primary examples that Wittgenstein focusses on of hinge commitments are mundane everyday commitments of a kind where to be wrong about this is to be radically in error; indeed, where error would entail that one's worldview as a whole is in question. Examples include that one has hands (in normal circumstances) (e.g., OC, §1), that one's name is such-and-such (e.g., OC, §425) and that one is speaking one's native language (e.g., OC, §158). These are not theoretical claims that we are all alleged to be committed to, in keeping with Hume's example of the commitment to an external world, but rather commitments that lie at the heart of one's worldview, a worldview that one acquired via one's socialization.

This contrast between Wittgenstein and Hume is at least partly acknowledged by Strawson, who compares the naturalism proper of Hume with the 'social naturalism' of Wittgenstein. But he fails to appreciate just how large the divide is between these two thinkers on this score. Strawson is misled by remarks that Wittgenstein makes in the first notebook of *On Certainty* about statements like 'There are physical objects' (OC, §35) or 'There is an external world' (OC, §20). He supposes that

Wittgenstein would follow Hume in treating these theoretical claims as hinge commitments too, albeit of a universal kind rather than the social product of a specific worldview. If that were right, then what Wittgenstein is advancing would be an extension of the Humean picture, whereby our hinge commitments take in not just theoretical claims that we are all obliged, via our natures, to have, but also a broader set of hinge commitments that are acquired via socialization into a particular worldview.

This is, however, a misreading of Wittgenstein, as he is in fact quite clear that it is only the everyday commonsense claims that are hinge commitments. Indeed, a careful reading of the first notebook indicates that Wittgenstein's stance on philosophical claims like 'There is an external world', in keeping with the line he takes in this regard in the *Philosophical Investigations*, is that such statements are simply meaningless (OC, §§35–37). In particular, they constitute uses of language that are so divorced from the ordinary practices that give our words their meaning that they fail to communicate anything at all. Moreover, it is clear that Wittgenstein's conception of hinge commitments is such that it couldn't include such theoretical claims anyway, as what is essential to such commitments is their mundanity. One's hinge commitments are such that their truth is so obvious for those who share one's worldview that one doesn't even consider them in ordinary life. But that entails that they cannot include theoretical, much less philosophical, statements, given that they are far from obvious from a folk point of view.[9] Wittgenstein's 'social naturalism' is thus discontinuous with Humean naturalism.

There is an even more important contrast between Hume and Wittgenstein in this respect, however, one that Strawson completely overlooks. This is because although Wittgenstein does emphasize the arational and non-optional nature of our hinge commitments, he doesn't suppose that this feature of them gains us any purchase on the problem of radical scepticism. It is, instead, merely a stepping-stone towards motivating a diagnosis of where the radical sceptic—and, for that matter, the traditional *anti*-sceptic—goes awry. It is this diagnostic account that then carries the anti-sceptical load.

Wittgenstein's idea is that it is not an incidental fact about our rational practices that they are structured such that arational hinge commitments provide the framework for rational evaluation. It is not as if, for example, our hinge commitments are necessary presuppositions or assumptions that we are obliged to have because of some cognitive limitation we face as human beings.[10] Instead, Wittgenstein's point is that it is essential to the very practice of rational evaluation that it is structured in this fashion; as Wittgenstein emphasizes at several junctures, the point he is making is a logical one (OC, §342). This has important ramifications for the proposal. For one thing, although our hinge commitments are not known, it would

be a mistake to suppose that we are somehow ignorant of them, as the point is rather that they are simply not in the market for knowledge. That is, our inability to know our hinge commitments is no more an indication of our ignorance than our inability to imagine a circle-square is an indication of our lack of imagination.[11]

The deeper point, however, is that Wittgenstein is arguing that the radical sceptic, along with those who uncritically respond to radical scepticism, are buying into a faulty theoretical picture. That is, the Wittgensteinian claim is that what looks like a paradox is in fact nothing of the sort, as rather than exposing a deep tension in our ordinary ways of thinking about knowledge, the sceptic is in fact trading on a conception of the structure of rational evaluation that is simply incoherent. Our ordinary rational practices, whereby rational evaluations are essentially local, are perfectly in order as they are. Where the radical sceptic and traditional anti-sceptic go awry is in supposing that one can harmlessly extrapolate from these local rational evaluations to undertake fully general rational evaluations, as if this were merely an extension of our ordinary rational practices. Wittgenstein's point, however, is that in the shift from local rational evaluations to universal rational evaluations one has bought into a picture of the structure of rational evaluation that is simply unintelligible. This is because to be a rational subject at all is to have arational hinge commitments that structure rational evaluation.

The reason why this point is so significant for our purposes is that it means that the Wittgensteinian line on radical scepticism in *On Certainty* is not appealing to the non-optionality of our hinge commitments in order to resolve the sceptical problematic. In fact, this naturalistic point is not load-bearing in terms of Wittgenstein's anti-scepticism at all. Instead, what in fact bears the anti-sceptical weight is Wittgenstein's diagnostic story about how radical scepticism doesn't trade on our ordinary conception of our rational practices but rather on a philosophical rendering of those practices that misrepresents them in crucial respects. Moreover, this philosophical picture is shown to be fundamentally incoherent. The upshot is that the apparent radical sceptical paradox is revealed to be illusory and thereby dissolved.

Unlike Hume's naturalistic anti-scepticism, Wittgenstein's anti-scepticism has application against radical scepticism *qua* paradox. This is not a criticism of Hume, of course, as his intended sceptical target, as we have seen, is a form of radical scepticism that is essentially embodied in nature. On the one hand, Hume *is* offering a naturalistic response to radical scepticism, albeit one that works only because its target is an embodied form of scepticism. On the other hand, Wittgenstein is *not* offering a naturalistic response to radical scepticism, even though he makes claims that can be regarded as broadly naturalistic as part of

the set-up for his diagnostic proposal because his target is the sceptical problem *qua* paradox.

Note too that on the Wittgensteinian picture, the bisperspectivalism that we saw with Hume is simply not an option. Indeed, Wittgenstein is quite emphatic that any professed doubt of one's hinge commitments of a kind put forward by philosophers must be in a sense fake, as one's actions will reveal that one's certainty in the target proposition remains undiminished. Indeed, he argues that someone who did lack the relevant hinge commitments—e.g., who was genuinely unsure in normal circumstances about whether she had hands—would be construed as being in the grip of a serious mental disorder (OC, §§71–75). In particular, one wouldn't account for such behaviour in terms of reasons at all, but in terms of causes (has this person had a bump on the head?). For Hume, in contrast, such doubt, albeit necessarily of a temporary kind, is possible due to the theoretical nature of the commitments in play. The everyday nature of the hinge commitments that Wittgenstein describes ensures, however, that even a temporary doubt is unavailable, at least for someone who occupies the space of reasons at all.[12]

In this respect, Wittgenstein is closer to the spirit of what Strawson had in mind, whereby genuine doubt of one's basic commitments is merely a pretence. Notice, however, an important difference of emphasis between Wittgenstein and Strawson. Whereas for Strawson doubt of one's fundamental commitments is a pretence because it is contrary to our nature, for Wittgenstein doubt of one's hinge commitments is a pretence because of the logical (and not merely natural) necessity of a rational person having such commitments. Again, then, we find that Wittgenstein is making a very different claim to that found in Strawson's anti-scepticism, one that is underwritten not by naturalism but rather by the diagnostic treatment that is being offered of radical scepticism.[13]

Notes

1 See Pritchard (2002).

2 The idea that the contemporary problem of radical scepticism is best construed as a paradox rather than as a position is usually attributed to Stroud (1984). For a discussion of this way of thinking about radical scepticism and its implications for how we should respond to it, see Pritchard (2015, part 1).

3 I explore this critical line in more detail in Pritchard (2015, part 2; *forthcoming*). For some other critiques of Strawson along this general line, see Sosa (1988, 160–3), Williams (1991, ch. 1) and Wright (1985, 429; 1990, 87). For Strawson's (rather unsatisfying) response to Sosa (1998), see Strawson (1998). See also Byrne (2004).

4 For two key discussions of the scope of Pyrrhonism in this respect, see Burnyeat (1980) and Frede (1984).

5 See Williams (1991, 10).

6 For an excellent recent discussion of this aspect of Hume's thought, see Ribeiro (2009*a*).

7 Indeed, a plausible case has been made that properly understood Hume is not attacking Pyrrhonian scepticism but rather defending it, at least under one guise anyway. That is, in this reading, the version of Pyrrhonian scepticism that Hume is attacking is in fact a misreading of the position, and the sceptical solution that he offers in response to this misconstrual of Pyrrhonian scepticism is in fact a credible rendering of the Pyrrhonian stance (albeit one where the scope of what is immune to the sceptical modes is broader than any classical Pyrrhonian might have imagined). For discussion of this general line, see Popkin (1980, 103–32), Annas (2000), Ribeiro (2009*b*; 2021) and Baxter (2018).

8 There is now a wealth of literature discussing Wittgenstein's views in *On Certainty*. For some of the key (post-Strawson (1985)) texts in this regard, see McGinn (1989), Williams (1991), Stroll (1994), Moyal-Sharrock (2004), Wright (2004*b*), Coliva (2015, 2022) and Schönbaumsfeld (2016). For a recent survey of this literature, see Pritchard (2017). Naturally, in what follows I will be putting forward my own favoured interpretation, as developed, for example, in Pritchard (2015, *passim*; 2018).

9 For more on this exegetical point that Wittgenstein in *On Certainty* regards philosophical statements like 'There is an external world' as meaningless, see Williams (2004, 2018) and Pritchard (2015, part 2; 2022). In addition, note that the point about hinge commitments being mundane commonsense features of one's worldview also entails that not every certainty that Wittgenstein discusses in *On Certainty* is a hinge commitment. For example, I have argued, *contra* Greco (2016), that in *On Certainty* Wittgenstein distinguishes between genuine hinge commitments and a distinct class of everyday certainty that concerns what we might call (following Greco) common knowledge. See Pritchard (2022).

10 Interestingly, there are readings of Wittgenstein that precisely treat our hinge commitments in this fashion. See, especially, Wright (2004*a*, 2004*b*, 2014) and Coliva (2015, 2022). As I explain in Pritchard (2023), however, this is simply a misreading of Wittgenstein's proposal.

11 For more on the notion of ignorance in play here, such that it demands more than merely the absence of knowledge, see Pritchard (2001*b*, 2001*c*).

12 Interestingly, the Wittgensteinian account of hinge commitments is compatible with a certain kind of intellectual anxiety about one's overall epistemic position, even if this anxiety cannot be properly classed as a doubt in the relevant sense. Elsewhere I have described this phenomenon (following Cavell) as *epistemic vertigo*. See Pritchard (2015, part 4; 2019, 2020, 2021*a*).

13 I am grateful to Scott Stapleford for detailed comments on an earlier version. This chapter was written while a Senior Research Associate of the *African Centre for Epistemology and Philosophy of Science* at the University of Johannesburg.

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Part VI

Naturalized Epistemology

11 The Advancement of Naturalized Epistemology

Reflections on Hume, Quine, and Anderson

Angela M. Coventry

11.1 Introduction

This chapter explores Hume's epistemology as a precursor to the naturalized epistemologies offered by Quine and Anderson. Naturalized epistemology generally refers to an approach wherein issues in epistemology are connected to the results of the natural sciences, such as empirical psychology. The term "naturalized epistemology" was introduced by Quine in his 1969 essay, "Epistemology Naturalized" (hereafter EN). Quine makes the case that epistemology must look at the psychology of our cognitive processes to understand how organisms come to develop beliefs about their environment via the stimulation of the senses. Quine's emphasis on the psychology of how our sensory input causes our epistemic output is explicitly based in the epistemological project pursued by Hume. Another sort of program that is grounded in Quine's naturalized epistemology has to do with the feminist epistemology presented by Anderson in the 1995 article, "Feminist Epistemology: An Interpretation and a Defense" (hereafter FE). Anderson pursues feminist epistemology as a branch of naturalized epistemology and develops a feminist approach to theoretical knowledge.

Focusing on the topics of empiricism, naturalism, imagination, and social relations, the chapter examines the ways in which Quine and Anderson's projects in naturalized epistemology may be understood as successors to Hume's epistemological framework. The chapter concludes with some remarks on the normative side of naturalized epistemology to show that situating these thinkers together may illuminate one of the more controversial aspects of Hume's philosophy to do with naturalism and skepticism. There are four main parts to the chapter. Section 11.2 deals with Quine and Hume on empiricism and naturalism, and Section 11.3 considers Anderson and Hume on empiricism and imagination. Sections 11.4 and 11.5 cover the social aspects of knowledge, and the role of the normative in epistemology in all three thinkers.

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11.2 Empiricism and Naturalism

Quine's "Epistemology Naturalized" begins with a brief history of epistemology in the context of the epistemology of mathematics. He notes that "Epistemology is concerned with the foundations of science," and so "includes broadly the study of the foundations of mathematics as one of its departments" (EN 69). In particular, Quine looks at the attempt by mathematicians to reduce the foundations of mathematics to logic and set theory. He identifies two sorts of studies on the foundation of mathematics: the conceptual and the doctrinal. The conceptual is about meaning, clarifying concepts by definition, and the doctrinal concerns truth, "establishing laws by proving them" (EN 69–70). Quine notes that the project stalled, however, "since mathematics reduces only to set theory and not to logic proper" (EN 70). The reduction of the foundation of mathematics is for Quine a "fascinating" enterprise, but he laments its failure to uncover the basis of mathematical knowledge or explain the source of mathematical certainty (EN 70).

Next, Quine draws "parallels" to a project in epistemology about sensory experience that is associated with Hume (EN 69). This project also has conceptual and doctrinal aspects. The conceptual side explains "the notion of body in sensory terms," and the doctrinal side concerns "justifying our knowledge of truths of nature in sensory terms" (EN 71). Quine finds that Hume had some success with conceptually identifying bodies with types of sense impressions but had limited doctrinal success, as statements about the future "gained no increment of certainty by being construed as impressions" (EN 72). This is the so-called problem of induction. Here Quine comments that statements about the future do not become more certain when interpreted as impressions. Quine thinks that we are no further along in doctrinal studies than in Hume's day, stating that "the Humean predicament is the human predicament" (EN 72). Some progress has been made in conceptual studies with the resort to contextual definition and to set theory. But when it comes to doctrinal progress, Quine maintains that "the Humean predicament remains unaltered," for simply because a statement can be framed using the language of observation, logic, and set theory does not imply that it can be proven based on observation statements through the application of logic and set theory (EN 74).

What remains for Quine are two "unassailable" tenets of empiricism (EN 75). First, that all the evidence that supports science is sensory in nature and that the ultimate foundation for the meanings of words lies in sensory evidence. According to Quine, all the evidence available to anyone is based on the stimulation of their sensory receptors (EN 72). Quine wonders why not simply observe the actual process of this construction and poses the question, "Why not settle for psychology?" (EN 75). This

means that we study the ways in which we do acquire or arrive at knowledge through our senses. In a famous passage, Quine declares epistemology to be a "chapter of psychology and hence of natural science":

> It studies a natural phenomenon, viz., a physical human subject. This human subject is accorded a certain experimentally controlled input—certain patterns of irradiation in assorted frequencies, for instance—and in the fullness of time the subject delivers as output a description of the three-dimensional external world and its history. The relation between the meager input and the torrential output is a relation that we are prompted to study for somewhat the same reasons that always prompted epistemology.
>
> (EN 82–3)

Quine describes the relation between the sciences and epistemology as one of "reciprocal containment," in that there is "epistemology in natural science and natural science in epistemology" (EN 83). The disciplines of epistemology and the natural sciences reinforce one another. In a famous image adapted from Neurath, Quine likens the ongoing intermingled effort of science and epistemology to the efforts of mariners rebuilding their boat while trying to stay afloat on the open sea using the materials they have at hand (EN 83–4).

As shown by Pakaluk (1989, 446; Morris 2021), Hume is indisputably a "forerunner" of Quine's empiricism and naturalism. Quine has been called even the "most important proponent of empiricism since Hume" (Woods 1998, 717). Hume adheres to both "tenets of empiricism" that Quine distinguishes, that sensory evidence is the sole source of evidence, and that the meanings of words rest on sensory evidence. Hume's science of the mind is based in "experience and observation," directed by the principle that all of our ideas are copied from sensory impressions (THN Intro.7; 1.1.1.7; EHU 2.5). There is no content of our thinking that is not dependent upon earlier sensory impressions. To make our terminology more precise, Hume recommends that we begin to inquire into the sensory experience that gives rise to the idea in question (EHU 2.9).

Quine also appears to be critical of Hume's empiricism in the 1951 piece, "Two Dogmas of Empiricism." The two dogmas of empiricism to be dismissed are the analytic–synthetic distinction and radical reductionism. At the outset of the piece, Quine (1951, 20) remarks that Hume's distinction between relations of ideas and matters of fact was later to be developed into the analytic–synthetic distinction, and he later cites Locke and Hume as progenitors of reductionism (1951, 36). As Pakaluk (1989, 446) observes, Quine finds in Hume "both dogmas of empiricism, albeit in prototypical form." On Pakaluk's (1989, 445) reading, Hume plays a

"mixed role" in Quine's empiricism overall. Pakaluk (1989, 447) suggests that Quine's work "modifies" and expands on Hume's central doctrines such as his empiricism and naturalism, taking them further than Hume himself did. Meeker (2011, 371) claims that Pakaluk's interpretation of the two thinkers implies that Quine's work built on, and in some manner, surpassed Hume's ideas, making it seem that "Quine was connecting dots that Hume missed." As a counterpoint, Meeker (2011, 372; 2013, 38–9) contends that Hume would actually be sympathetic with Quine's treatment of the two dogmas, and that Quine goes as far as to suggest that Hume intentionally treated analytic statements in a manner that eroded the separation between relations of ideas/analytic statements and matters of fact/synthetic statements, essentially "undermining" the distinction.

When it comes to naturalism, both Hume and Quine rule out any extra-sensory source of knowledge: there is no appeal to anything outside of nature to explain phenomena (THN Intro.8; NE 75; Morris 2021, 13309).[1] Hume's science restricts knowledge to sensory experience only, borrowing from the methods and results of the experimental natural science in his time (THN Intro.7). Quine's naturalism similarly adopts "the methods and techniques of natural science" to study the ways in which certain sensations allow us to construct certain beliefs about the natural world (Hylton 2007, 2; Roth 2005, 88f). Epistemic inquiry should be consistent with our current scientific views regarding the natural world. Quine (1969, 127) thinks all relevant scientific findings "that are at present plausible" are "welcome for use in philosophy." Quine (1969, 126–7; 1995b, 256–7) describes his naturalism as seeing philosophy as "continuous with science" in that philosophy and science are in the same boat—Neurath's boat, of course.

Another point of contact is that Hume and Quine see their projects in relation to the sciences as mutually supportive. There is Quine's notion of containment, that there is epistemology in science, and science in epistemology, and the disciplines of epistemology and the sciences to be in collaboration with one another. This position has an antecedent in Hume's science of the mind that embraces the current science of his time and sees the results of his own project as applicable to other disciplines (THN Intro.4–7). Hume suggests that after identifying the fundamental principles of a science of human nature, the next step is to extend their influence to other sciences to provide a comprehensive "system of the sciences, built on a foundation almost entirely new" (THN Intro.6).

11.3 Empiricism and Imagination

Anderson's feminist epistemology aligns with Quine and Hume in asserting that all knowledge must have its foundation in human

experiences. Anderson understands feminist epistemology as a "social branch of naturalized epistemology" (FE 53).[2] She interprets naturalized epistemologists, such as Quine, to "consider knowledge production as an activity in which inquirers are subject to the same causal forces that affect their objects of study" (FE 54). The feminist naturalized epistemologist investigates the impact of socially constructed ideas and standards related to gender, as well as gender-specific interests and experiences, on the generation of knowledge. Anderson's paper covers two aims for the project of naturalized feminist epistemology with respect to theoretical knowledge. The first is to explain the "achievements of feminist criticism of science," and the second to defend feminist scientific practices (FE 51). Anderson argues that these aims can be satisfied while retaining commitments to a modest empiricism and to rational inquiry.

Anderson defines "empiricism" as the view that "all the evidence that we have about the world is ultimately provided by experience" (FE 51). Anderson denies the common meaning of "empiricism" that imposes *a priori* restrictions on the kinds of things and ideas that science can take seriously. Moderate empiricism is "a purely methodological doctrine, which rejects *a priori* commitments to what the content of our theories and models must be" (FE 52). Any hypothesis or approach is permissible as long as it contributes to the objectives of uncovering and elucidating new phenomena, while also adhering to the requirement that the resulting theories aim for empirical accuracy. Anderson claims that "Empiricism is promiscuous in its permissible ontology and opportunistic in its methods and models" (FE 52).

Anderson thinks of reason as a kind of power or ability to change our "attitudes, intentions and practices" after reflection upon the benefits or advantages of holding certain attitudes, intentions, or engaging in certain practices (FE 52). Theoretical reason applies to our attitudes and the practices of inquiry. For Anderson, theoretical reason has "the power to acquire, reject, and revise our cognitive attitudes" as well as our practices of inquiry by "reflection on our reasons for holding them and engaging in them" (FE 52). The practice of reflective endorsement is the test for what "counts as a reason for having any attitude or engaging in any practice of inquiry" (FE 53). Anderson's test emphasizes the importance of critically examining the influence a particular consideration has on our attitudes and practices. We need to reflect on how this consideration might or already does affect us, such as our beliefs, feelings, or actions, and given the implications of such influence, we then question whether we can support or endorse this impact, "its influencing us in those ways" (FE 53). If it passes the test, if "we can reflectively endorse its influence," then we may "count the consideration as a reason for our attitudes or practices" (FE 53).

Anderson calls this process of reason, "reflective self-government," and indicates that this rational inquiry is a "social enterprise" (FE 53). This can be seen in the fact that in order for something to count as empirical evidence in supporting or rejecting a theory, it must be "publicly accessible," and reproducible (FE 53). Also, people use the tools, concepts, and methods developed by others to get started, and rely on others for data collection, and even data interpretation, to conduct their inquiries. Anderson argues that relying solely on oneself for understanding is unattainable because our personal experiences, even though they feel uniquely ours, are significantly shaped by collective societal influences. The pursuit of knowledge is not an individual endeavor, but rather "a social achievement" (FE 53).

There is a link between Anderson and Hume on the relation between empiricism and imagination. Anderson says in her definition of "empiricism" that no "thought process operating independently of empirical evidence can rule out any conceivable hypothesis about the world" (FE 51). The idea is that if a person's thought process functions without relying on empirical evidence, then they cannot definitively eliminate or dismiss any imaginable hypothesis about the world. Anderson explains two implications of her empiricism. First, that "for all we know, *anything* can cause *anything*, and *anything* might provide an illuminating fruitful model for *any other phenomenon*" (FE 51–52). For Anderson, there are no *a priori* limitations imposed on the concepts or terminology we employ when trying to understand the world, as long as these concepts effectively contribute to the formulation of theories that possess empirical consequences. Second, that we must freely and fully develop our imaginations if we expect to discover the best theories. Anderson thinks that "we can never know what further stretch of the imagination might uncover and explain what further expanse of the world" (FE 52). This matters since feminist epistemology and feminist criticisms of science may contain empirical claims about the influence of gender on science that appear at first glance to be unimaginable, and it is important to emphasize that nothing in empiricism justifies dismissing such claims out of hand.

Hume's empiricism makes extensive use of the faculty of imagination for features of the mind such as general ideas, how we reason from causes to effects, and is responsible for numerous fictions to do with personal identity, external objects, and even social arrangements. There is a similarity between Anderson's definition of "empiricism' and Hume's reliance on the "establish'd maxim in metaphysics," sometimes called the conceivability principle, *That whatever the mind clearly conceives includes the idea of possible existence*, or in other words, *that nothing we imagine is absolutely impossible* (THN 1.2.2.8). The maxim features in several arguments such as his charge that the causal maxim, "whatever has a beginning has also a cause of existence," is neither intuitively nor demonstrably certain

(THN 1.3.3.2–3). Hume's commitment to the conceivability principle reminds us to be cautious when dismissing ideas as absolutely impossible, as long as they have empirical grounding for if you can conceive of something clearly, then it contains the idea that it could possibly exist in reality. Anderson's application to the relevance of the imagination to theoretical inquiry is that if someone's thinking is entirely reliant on empirical evidence, then they cannot completely exclude any conceivable explanation or theory about the way things work.

Mirroring Anderson's first implication of empiricism, Hume also affirms that "Any thing may produce any thing. Creation, annihilation, motion, reason, volition; all these may arise from one another, or from any other object we can imagine" (THN 1.3.15.1). Hume's point is that without consulting actual real-life experience, we cannot definitively identify any objects as the direct causes of others, and by using that same method, we cannot confidently rule out any objects as definitely not being the causes. The context is how to determine the relations between causes and effects where Hume offers general rules to guide and amend our reasonings. Anderson's context is the development of an empiricism that advocates for opening up lines of inquiry between disciplines as any phenomenon can serve as a useful model or framework for understanding another phenomenon. For Anderson, this openness had the potential for unexpected connections and correlations between different phenomena. This supports the value of interdisciplinary thinking, and the importance of using diverse models to gain insights into the particular inquiry at hand, as recommended by both Hume and Quine's naturalism.

11.4 The Social Dimension of Naturalized Epistemology

Hume, Quine, and Anderson all incorporate social aspects in their epistemological programs. Hume's science favors the observation of a world of persons with whom we interact (THN Intro.10; Broughton 1992). We regularly rely on the testimony of others to understand the world (EHU 10.5). The veracity of human testimony varies but we learn though experience how to determine the trustworthiness of testimony (EHU 10.5). Hume finds that "a confidence in human testimony," to be useful for "books and conversation enlarge […] the sphere of one man's experience and thought" (EHU 9.5n20.11). Hume describes the discipline of mathematics as social, as the mathematician gains confidence in their results not just by going over their own proofs, but also by showing them to friends and the learned world (THN 1.4.1.2). Recently, Demeter (2017, 3615) demonstrates that Hume appeals to social practices in mathematics and outlines "the social genealogy of a community-wide mathematical certainty."

Morris (2009, 443f, 448) emphasizes that Hume sees the acquisition of language as social, and that the controversy over liberty and necessity is "a social problem" due to users of a shared public language who disagree in that they assign different ideas to these same words. Morris also highlights that Hume on moral appraisal operates socially.[3] Morris (2009, 444) claims that Hume's account of artificial virtues arises from "a shared public world where humans check and regulate their speech and thoughts through shared criteria." In exchanges with others, we correct our language with regard to sentiments of praise and blame from a common point of view. Hume finds these sorts of corrections to be "common with regard to all the senses," and necessary for communication among members in society (THN 3.3.1.16, 30). Hume recognizes that sometimes our sentiments are stubborn and difficult to change (THN 3.3.1.16). But people can modify the expression of those feelings and correct their language. While we may not always be able to change our feelings, we can use our experiences to improve how we communicate and interact with others.

For Quine as well, language is acquired socially and meaning is corrected publicly. Quine's naturalizing project has knowledge embodied within a shared language community. As Drobňák recognizes (2018), on Quine's view, the community of speakers of a language assists newcomers in learning when certain words and/or sentences are deemed appropriate and when they are not. Hylton (2007, 98) explains the connection between language and knowledge for Quine as a "concern with human knowledge, and how we come by it, [which] is also and at the same time a concern with cognitive language and how we come by it." Language is tied to sensory stimulation and, by this tie, is about the world. Only sentences that have contact with sensory stimulation allow us to create predictions or hypotheses. To determine the meaningfulness of a word or statement, one must take into account the social character of language, for learning a language is a social affair. According to Quine, a child learns their "first words and sentences by hearing and using them in the presence of appropriate stimuli" (EN 81). The stimuli are external, "for they must act both on the child and on the speaker from whom he is learning" (EN 81; Quine 1992, 37–8). Given this relation, Quine sees language as "socially inculcated and controlled; the inculcation and control turn strictly on the keying of sentences to shared stimulation" (EN 81). To properly figure out how an individual comes to have certain knowledge and beliefs within a social context, Quine required an analysis of cognitive language acquisition from infancy (Hylton 2007, Chapter 4).

Anderson's distinctive contribution in feminist naturalized epistemology stresses that we should pay close attention to the social factors surrounding knowledge production. This is because the theories that arise from our

research methods might be influenced by the social relations among the researchers. Relevant are the interpersonal connections, interactions, collaborations, dynamics, and the social context and structures within which researchers operate. Another implication addresses the influence of gender on the practices and outcomes of inquiry. In feminist naturalized epistemology, progress is made by reflection on and conscious rejection of certain ways in which gender may affect inquiry. In doing so, it is unnecessary to insist that researchers detach entirely from their gender. Anderson allows there are certain "ineradicable cognitive biases or partiality due to gender or other influences" (FE 53). However, Anderson thinks that if the "proper checks and balances" are implemented, and that if "the social relations of inquirers are well arranged then each person's biases can check and correct the others'" (FE 53). Anderson recommends the scientific community include "a diversity of inquirers who accept different background assumptions" (FE 80).

Hume also recognizes that our judgments can be partial and unduly influenced by irrelevant factors, and that judgements can be improved. Hume describes four instances of problematic probability judgements, known as the "unphilosophical probabilities." First, our probability judgments are affected by the reduction of impact of feelings and memory over time; second, that our judgments are more affected by events that have happened recently; third, that our judgments are affected by the number of steps involved in following along with arguments; and fourth, that our judgements are subject to prejudices, such as rash generalizations about a person based on their country of origin. Hume thinks that we can correct these irregular judgments by reflecting on the rules to judge causes and effects (THN 1.3.15). By this reflective self-regulation, we can learn to distinguish the "accidental circumstances from the efficacious causes" (THN 1.3.13.11). The rules are formed by our practical experience in using our cognitive faculties in the past when making judgments about objects in the world. In other words, they are developed based on observations of how our minds operate when we assess and make decisions about the things we encounter in our daily experience. The application of the rules determines the relevant causes at work, and eliminates the irrelevant factors, to secure a proper judgment.

Anderson adds another sort of bias to be checked to do with the ways in which gender may impact research processes and outcomes. Anderson's explanation assumes that every individual is subject to some biases that cannot be totally eradicated, but that practices put into place that promote correction may moderate them. Hume makes a similar move not just in the correction of judgements but also in explaining the origin of government. Government is invented to deal with incurable features of human nature: self-interest, and the preference for what is present and near to

what is distant and remote (THN 3.2.7.1–2). We cannot expect humans to change their nature, and the institutions of government emerge as an "expedient, by which men cure their natural weakness, and lay themselves under the necessity of observing the laws of justice and equity, notwithstanding their violent propension to prefer contiguous to remote" (THN 3.2.7.6). Now, Hume's focus here is the creation of government, whereas Anderson expresses a vision for theoretical inquiry that encompasses a diverse community of scholars advancing knowledge, "when no individual's thought processes are perfectly impartial, objective, or sound" (FE 53). Yet, both Hume and Anderson, in their respective accounts, acknowledge the inherent limitations of human nature and reasoning, while also expressing optimism that these limitations can be mitigated or amended by implementing the appropriate set of procedures.

11.5 Skepticism, Naturalism, and Normativity

So far, some Humean features of Quine and Anderson's naturalized epistemology on topics of empiricism, naturalism, imagination, and the social dynamics of knowledge have been tracked. This section connects Quine and Anderson to the much-discussed skeptical and naturalist aspects of Hume's philosophy. In Hume scholarship, the interpretative difficulty centers on whether Hume's skeptical commitments undermine his positive project of a naturalistic science of human nature. There are a variety of interpretations that range from those commentators who hold that Hume's naturalism and skepticism mutually support each other, that the naturalism defeats or overcomes his skepticism, to those who argue that Hume's skepticism either destroys or leads to serious problems for his naturalism.[4]

Quine sees no tension between Hume's naturalism and skepticism. In his 1946 "Lectures on David Hume's Philosophy," Quine reads Hume as a skeptic that denounces the idea of any real metaphysical truth lying behind experience. Hume's stance is skeptical in that the attempt to discover a foundation beneath or beyond science itself is futile and destined to fail, but there is not total hopelessness or inactivity. Instead, Hume continues with the same enthusiasm for scientific inquiry as before, without the metaphysical baggage, and this enthusiasm is to be celebrated. In fact, Hume's skepticism rather makes for a fruitful epistemological project consistent with scientific practices. Quine (1946, 135f) finds Hume's skepticism "as decidedly in the scientific spirit." On the other side, Meeker (1998, 2013) thinks Hume's skepticism causes serious problems for his naturalism. Meeker thinks Hume's system denies knowledge, since it denies the possession of justified beliefs. He (1998, 44) does not think that this interpretation is "inconsistent *per se* with Hume's naturalism, but trouble arises when Hume discusses the principles we ought to follow." Meeker

(1998, 39) points out that "Hume never explicitly tells us his *precise* views about normative epistemic properties." Meeker's (1998, 44) challenge for the naturalist interpretation is to explain exactly how we get "epistemic justification or normativity from simply describing how we acquire our beliefs."

Meeker (1998, 39) points out that in contemporary philosophy, a similar interpretive issue arises for Quine's brand of naturalized epistemology. Quine's emphasis on studying the psychological history of a subject's cognitive processes has led many critics to regard him as abolishing the normative element of epistemology. Kim (1988) alleges that Quine aims only to describe or explain how our beliefs are formed, using the resources of cognitive psychology. Kim assumes that Quine is interested solely in a descriptive or explanatory effort, and not in the normative project of explaining how our beliefs are justified. Kim even takes the abandonment of normativity to be what is really distinctive about Quine's proposal. Kim (1988, 388) states, "He is asking us to set aside the entire framework of justification-centered epistemology. That is what is new in Quine's proposals. Quine is asking us to put in its place a purely descriptive, causal-nomological science of human cognition." Meeker endorses Kim's interpretation of Quine. Meeker (1998, 39) thinks that when Quine encouraged epistemologists to focus on describing the processes through which our beliefs are formed, "he was in effect saying that we should eliminate normative epistemic judgments." Further, Meeker (1998, 39) argues that it certainly sounds as though Hume is abandoning epistemic normativity as well, and so we can suppose that "Hume's system raises the same problem of epistemic normativity that has surfaced with naturalized epistemology."

It seems accurate to say that Hume does not address the matter of normativity directly. Many Hume scholars do work to figure out the normative elements in his philosophy.[5] The same sort of work is done in Quine scholarship.[6] However, of note is that both Quine and Anderson do directly address the normativity issue in naturalized epistemology, and that both Quine and Anderson defend normativity in naturalized epistemology. For both Quine and Anderson, the notion of normativity revolves around the importance of critical assessment, and the improvement of the methods and practices within the realm of sciences, and these concerns may be traced to aspects of Hume's philosophy.

Quine resists the idea that there is no normativity in naturalized epistemology on a few occasions. He (1995a, 49) emphasizes that a "normative domain within epistemology survives the conversion to naturalism, contrary to widespread belief." Elsewhere, Quine (1982, 664) maintains that naturalized epistemology "does not jettison the normative and settle for the indiscriminate description of ongoing procedures." Naturalized

normative epistemology is classified as an applied science, in particular, as a department of engineering. To quote from Quine:

> It is the technology of truth-seeking, or, in a more cautiously epistemological term, prediction. Like any technology, it makes free use of whatever scientific findings may suit its purpose. It draws upon mathematics ... in scouting the gambler's fallacy. It draws on experimental psychology in exposing perceptual illusions. ... There is no question here of ultimate value, as in morals; it is a matter of efficacy for an ulterior end, truth or prediction. The normative here, as elsewhere in engineering, becomes descriptive when the terminal parameter is expressed.
>
> (1982, 665)

Quine's normative epistemology tells us how we should act in order to obtain successful theories from our predictions and hypotheses (Hylton 2007, 84f). Quine (1990, 239) sees the normative element in epistemology as "the technology of predicting sensory stimulation" and is primarily "concerned with the art of guessing, or framing hypotheses" (1995a, 49). This technology relies on the best existing scientific information that is relevant in the quest for truth or prediction. Quine proposes that the normative aspect becomes descriptive once you specify the final goal or outcome—the norms become descriptions of how to achieve that goal.

In *Science and Sensibilia*, Quine revisits the normative side of naturalized epistemology, with another appeal to engineering:

> I am sometimes asked what happens to the normative force of epistemology when epistemology is absorbed thus into the empirical science of psychology. Are we bound to say that in science anything goes, just so as it is already going? By no means. The critique of thinking has its place in applied science, on a par with engineering. Far from being nullified by the naturalizing of epistemology, it is bolstered by it; for the findings of science itself become available for normative use.
>
> (Quine 2019, 33)

In the passage, Quine rejects the concern that anything is permissible as long as it aligns with existing scientific practices. Quine suggests that the "critique of thinking," such as evaluating and questioning the thought processes and methodologies, has a place in applied science, similar to engineering. This allows within the empirical sciences room for critical evaluation as well as the refinement of methods and practices. The naturalizing of epistemology strengthens rather than nullifies the normative aspects of epistemology. This is because the findings of empirical science

can inform normative principles and standards, helping to refine and guide both scientific and philosophical inquiry.

Quine (1995a, 50) says that naturalized normative epistemology is not just a technology of truth-seeking, but also of "rational belief generally," and so involves standards of correction and practices for the refinement of belief. Naturalized normative epistemology uses scientific insights to identify and counteract cognitive biases like the gambler's fallacy, the belief that the probability of future events is influenced by past events when they are actually independent. Quine states that the "correction of this sort of error is the therapeutic side of statistical theory, a substantial branch of applied mathematics that is part and parcel of normative epistemology." The integration of epistemology into empirical psychology enhances normative considerations by allowing empirical findings to contribute to the development of normative principles in both philosophy and science. Quine (1995a, 49) even proposes general "norms" for science, the "conservatism finding, or the maxim of minimum mutilation, and simplicity," and five features of successful scientific theories: simplicity, familiarity of principle, scope, fecundity, and the favorable testing of said theory (1976, 247).

From the perspective of feminist naturalized epistemology, Anderson suggests a few ways in which naturalized epistemology can "support normative views about how we ought to produce knowledge claims" and "can get critical leverage on our knowledge practices" (FE 54). One way has to do with Anderson's reflective self-endorsement test. The test studies how knowledge claims are actually produced, to support normative views about how we ought to produce knowledge claims. This means that inquirers need to "examine our belief-formation processes" (FE 55). When we examine our belief formation practices, we may find that some of these processes function in a way that, upon introspection into their mechanisms and outcomes, we are no longer confident in the beliefs they generate, "since they do not reliably lead to true beliefs" (FE 55). On the other hand, there are other processes that may pass the reflective endorsement test: upon consideration of their operations and effects, we find ourselves endorsing them along with the beliefs they produce. For Anderson, a rational "knowledge practice" is one that "promotes such critical self-reflections and responds to them by checking or canceling out the unreliable belief-formation mechanisms and enabling the reliable ones" (FE 55).

There are glimpses of Quine and Anderson's normativity in the natural in Hume's science. Like Anderson, Hume considers belief a central topic and examines how it arises in several topics such as the causal inference, the self, the external world. Hume is also interested in the nature and sources of belief, as well as the various factors that influence belief, and the effect of belief on action (THN 1.3.8–10). We have seen that Hume also has his own reflective test for evaluating our beliefs and judgement in

his account of the four "unphilosophical probabilities," and the rules to judge causes and effects. As Falkenstein (1997, 31, 59) states, Hume's naturalism allows that our belief formation mechanisms lead to the possibility of forming beliefs that are warranted but also provides "for the possibility of our sometimes revising our other beliefs in light of them." The rules to judge causes and effect are supposed to correct the biases in judgement that might result from the mind having been unreasonably affected by the frequent experience of the accidental causes. Hume directs us to examine our judgment and compare it to a more standard and widely accepted operation of human reasoning. If we find the judgement to be "of an irregular nature," then we reject it as it contradicts established principles of reasoning, and as not a reliable or valid way of thinking (THN 1.3.13.12). Hume advocates that we "ought to regulate our judgement concerning causes and effects" by these rules (THN 1.3.13.11). He also approves of the "wise" person who proportions their belief to the available evidence (EHU 10.4).

Morris (2006, 91) argues that Hume on the standards of causal reasoning is "genuinely normative." Morris (2006, 89) explains, "Hume doesn't merely describe how we regulate our conduct: he endorses certain ways of forming beliefs and rejects others. Then he goes one step further and recommends that we endorse them as well." Another example in the literature of this sort of interpretation of the normativity in Hume may be seen in Loeb (1995, 2002). For Loeb (2002, Ch. 4), Hume allows corrections to our variable judgments about probability, virtue, and vice, and these result in more stable judgments that have normative standing. Stable beliefs have a reliable connection to the truth, and the epistemic implication is that we are entitled normatively speaking to the relevant beliefs. When it comes to normativity in naturalism, Hume, Quine, and Anderson all propose that inquirers critically reflect on belief formation practices, advance the sorts of belief formation processes that are more reliable, and avoid the less reliable belief formation practices. This informs normativity in naturalism by promoting stable ways to produce knowledge claims.

This approach to normative epistemology makes progress through refinements and expansions of reasoning and practices, all with the aim of reducing errors and ungrounded beliefs. This normativity is evident in the field of the medical sciences, particularly medical epistemology. As shown by Khushf (2013), the contributions of Kassirer and Kopelman (1991), regarding the clinical reasoning process, Sox et al. (2007), and Jenicek (2019), concerning medical decision-making (MDM), are normative because they offer suggestions on how clinicians should best reason and make decisions and employ a logic of justification to differentiate real knowledge from presumed knowledge. Kassirer and Kopelman (1991)

explain things such as generating and refining diagnostic hypotheses, using and interpreting diagnostic tests, assembling a working diagnosis, decision-making, examining evidence, and reducing cognitive errors. Sox et al. (2006) show how to make the best clinical decisions based on the available evidence and how to use clinical guidelines appropriately. Jenicek (2019) focuses on the sort of critical reasoning required to build the best possible evidence, utilize it in practice and research, and how to make the most appropriate decisions in medicine. Khushf (2013, Section II) promotes the tools of evidence-based medicine (EBM) and MDM in the field of medical epistemology as an example where epistemology and the sciences converge, echoing the value of interdisciplinary connections, in keeping with the naturalistic approaches to inquiry advocated by Hume, Quine, and Anderson.

11.6 Conclusion

This chapter looked at the origins of two twentieth-century projects in naturalized epistemology in Hume's eighteenth-century science of the mind. Naturalized epistemologists, past and present, emphasize knowledge acquisition in experience, and in a social context. Naturalized epistemologies also feature the pursuit of interdisciplinary connections and may endorse a progressive set of normative knowledge practices. Looking ahead, a defense of Hume's naturalism in a contemporary setting may find resources in more recent naturalized epistemology projects that deal with the normative for inspiration. Finally, an offshoot of this union are the extra resources available which can be utilized as support for a more well-balanced understanding of the history of projects in naturalized epistemology.[7]

Notes

1 For more on Hume and Quine's naturalisms, see Garrett (2006, 301–2) and Haack (1993), respectively.
2 Other feminist naturalized epistemologies can be found in Nelson (1990), Tuana (1992), and Antony (1993).
3 See also Taylor (1998, 2002) and Costa (1993).
4 For a survey of the various skeptical and naturalist interpretations, see Fosl (2010) and Qu (2019).
5 See, for example, Loeb (2002), Morris (2006, 89–91), Garrett (2016), Qu (2016), and Radcliffe (2020).
6 For instance, Houkes (2002), Hylton (2007, 83f), Ebbs (2019).
7 I would like to thank Elizabeth Radcliffe, Josh Gert, Miriam McCormick, and the audience members at a session of a *Conference in Honor of Elizabeth S. Radcliffe* at the College of William and Mary in September 2023. My thanks

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Part VII

Modal Epistemology

12 Conceivability as the *Standard* of Metaphysical Possibility

Miren Boehm

Without its name, Hume's descriptions of the imagination might deceive us into believing he is referring to some powerful divinity that operates in our soul. The imagination is "a kind of magical faculty in the soul" that "runs from one end of the universe to the other" collecting ideas (T 1.1.7.15). Nothing, Hume insists in the *Treatise*, "is more free than that faculty" (T 1.1.1.4).[1] Nothing, Hume insists in the first *Enquiry*, "is more free than the imagination of man" (E 5.10).[2] The imagination "has the command over all its ideas, and can join, and mix, and vary them in all the ways possible" (T 1.3.7.7–E 5.12). "Nothing is more admirable, than the readiness, with which the imagination suggests its ideas" (T 1.1.7.15). Without this admirable readiness we would be unable to engage in general thought. The imagination is also the "ultimate standard" of geometry (T 1.2.4.29). And of course, without the imagination, there would be no inductive reasoning. Hence Hume's exaltation: "The *imagination* of man is naturally sublime" (E 12.25).

But one thing is being sublime, and another is having supernatural abilities. Hume remarks that "nothing of which we can form a clear and distinct idea is absurd and impossible" (T 1.1.7.6); that "whatever we conceive is possible, at least in a metaphysical sense" (A 11). And in an often-quoted passage, he remarks:

> 'Tis an establish'd maxim in metaphysics, *That whatever the mind clearly conceives includes the idea of possible existence*, or in other words, *that nothing we imagine is absolutely impossible*. We can form the idea of a golden mountain, and from thence conclude that such a mountain may actually exist. We can form no idea of a mountain without a valley, and therefore regard it as impossible.
>
> (T 1.2.2.8)

Stephen Yablo (1993, 4–6) finds an ambiguity in the above passage between two readings: (a) we *ascribe* metaphysical possibility on the basis

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of conceivability and (b) the imagination *reveals or informs* us of metaphysical possibilities. Don Ainslie rejects the first option because according to him it requires an idea of possibility, which, he thinks, Hume lacks. But then he ponders: "Why does our thinking that something might exist suffice for it to be a real possibility? In what sense do our powers of thought reflect the modal structure of things?" (2015, 175). Good questions. If Hume is committed to the view that our ability to form ideas gives us *access* to metaphysical realities, then he owes us an explanation of how this trick works because there appears to be no natural or intelligible connection between our capacity to imagine certain things and their possible existence. I think J. S. Mill speaks for most of us when he remarks that

> our capacity or incapacity of conceiving a thing has very little to do with the possibility of the thing in itself; but is in truth very much an affair of accident, and depends on the past history and habits of our own minds.[3]

The so-called Conceivability Principle (henceforth CP) plays crucial roles in several of Hume's most powerful and consequential arguments, but it remains a mystery why he does not bother to defend or even explain the principle. One of the formulations of the CP above declares that nothing of which we have "clear and distinct ideas" is absurd or impossible, but even the nature of these ideas is an open question, as is of course the relation between them and metaphysical possibility. Outside of Hume scholarship, the CP, in its epistemic reading, has been proclaimed defeated. It is argued that conceivability is not a guide to metaphysical possibility because we can conceive water to be XYZ, although it is an (a posteriori) metaphysical necessity that water is H_2O. And it is not just a posteriori necessary identities such as water and H_2O and gold and atomic number 79 that threaten the epistemic CP but also mathematical conjectures where both their truth and falsehood are conceivable.

In this chapter, focusing mostly on Hume's *A Treatise of Human Nature*, I attempt to carve some conceptual space for a different reading of the CP—we can call it the "attributional" reading (in contrast to the "epistemic" reading) of the CP. On this reading, we attribute metaphysical possibility on the basis of conceivability. Hume connects a priori knowledge with metaphysical necessity and conceivability with metaphysical possibility. And he deploys both knowledge and conceivability together as tools against rationalism in his treatment in the Causal Maxim and induction; in the first part of the chapter, I outline these texts. Second, I consider Hume's account of knowledge and its relation to metaphysical necessity; this discussion offers some important clues for how to think about the CP. Third, I put forward a reading of "clear and distinct" ideas

and metaphysical possibility. On my reading, "x is metaphysically possible" means that the existence of x cannot be ruled out *a priori*. I situate this reading within what I understand to be Hume's overarching project in the *Treatise*, or his "Foundational Project" (Boehm, 2013a).

Knowledge and Conceivability: The Causal Maxim and Induction

"Why a cause is always necessary" (T 1.3.3) is the title of the third section of Part 3 of Book 1 called "Of Knowledge and Probability." "Why a cause is always necessary" is also the question that sets the agenda for almost everything that follows in Part 3. Hume begins his inquiry into the Causal Maxim or the principle that "*whatever begins to exist, must have a cause of existence*" (T 1.3.3.1; emphasis original) as follows:

> 'Tis suppos'd to be founded on intuition, and to be one of those maxims, which tho' they may be deny'd with the lips, 'tis impossible for men in their hearts really to doubt of. But if we examine this maxim by the idea of knowledge above-explain'd, we shall discover in it no mark of any such intuitive certainty; but on the contrary shall find, that 'tis of a nature quite foreign to that species of conviction.
>
> (T 1.3.3.1)

Here Hume appeals to his account of knowledge, in particular intuitive knowledge to reject the alleged source of our certainty in the Causal Maxim. The Causal Maxim has "no mark" of intuitive certainty. In the next section, we will see exactly what this means. But the appeal to knowledge is only Hume's first line of attack against the Causal Maxim's rationalistic pretensions. The second is the Conceivability Principle, and it is worth considering the whole passage:

> But here is an argument, which proves at once, that the foregoing proposition [the Causal Maxim] is neither intuitively nor demonstrably certain. We can never demonstrate the necessity of a cause to every new existence, or new modification of existence, without shewing at the same time the impossibility there is, that any thing can ever begin to exist without some productive principle; and where the latter proposition cannot be prov'd, we must despair of ever being able to prove the former. Now that the latter proposition is utterly incapable of a demonstrative proof, we may satisfy ourselves by considering, that as all distinct ideas are separable from each other, and as the ideas of cause and effect are evidently distinct, *'twill be easy for us to conceive* any object to be non-existent this moment, and existent the next, without conjoining to it the distinct idea of a cause or productive principle. The

> separation, therefore, of the idea of a cause from that of a beginning of existence, is plainly possible for the imagination; and consequently the actual separation of these objects is so far possible, that it implies no contradiction nor absurdity; and is therefore incapable of being refuted by any reasoning from mere ideas; without which 'tis impossible to demonstrate the necessity of a cause.
>
> (T 1.3.3.3; my emphasis)

The imagination can definitively determine that the necessity of a cause to every beginning of existence is not *metaphysical*. Importantly, Hume does *not* deny the necessity; he only objects to the *kind* of necessity we believe is involved in the Causal Maxim.

The appeal to knowledge is also the first step in Hume's treatment of inductive reasoning:

> There is no object, which implies the existence of any other if we consider these objects in themselves, and never look beyond the ideas which we form of them. Such an inference wou'd amount to knowledge, and wou'd imply the absolute contradiction and impossibility of conceiving any thing different. But as all distinct ideas are separable, 'tis evident there can be no impossibility of that kind.
>
> (T 1.3.6.1)

Hume's phrase "if we consider these objects in themselves, and never look beyond the ideas which we form of them" is crucial (and I will appeal to it later) because the ideas at play in metaphysical necessity or possibility are "mere ideas" and this passage refers to them. What follows the appeal to his account of knowledge is Hume's second line of attack: the Conceivability Principle.

> there can be no *demonstrative* arguments to prove, *that those instances, of which we have had no experience, resemble those, of which we have had experience*. We can at least conceive a change in the course of nature; which sufficiently proves, that such a change is not absolutely impossible. To form a clear idea of any thing, is an undeniable argument for its possibility, and is alone a refutation of any pretended demonstration against it.
>
> (T 1.3.6.5; emphasis original)

The imagination is again a powerful tool for denying knowledge in the strict sense; it is an "undeniable argument for its possibility, and is alone a refutation of any pretended demonstration." Knowledge and conceivability work in tandem as mighty weapons against the alleged rational

foundation of the Causal Maxim and causal inference. Although Hume does not elaborate on the relation between conceivability and metaphysical possibility, his comments regarding the relation between knowledge and metaphysical necessity offer helpful clues.

(A Priori) Knowledge and Metaphysical Necessity

Hume's account of knowledge takes up only one of 16 sections of Part 3 of Book 1 called "Of Knowledge and Probability." Given that knowledge occupies such a tiny part, it is curious, perhaps, that Hume includes it in the title. However, he returns to his account of knowledge repeatedly throughout Book 1 and he does so at crucial junctures and to establish some of his most important arguments.

Earlier in the *Treatise*, Hume identifies seven "philosophical relations," which for him are the most general subjects of comparison. In the section on knowledge, he divides these relations sharply into two groups: "such as depend entirely on the ideas, which we compare together," and those that "may be chang'd without any change in the ideas" (T 1.3.1.1). The "Invariable Relations" are resemblance, contrariety, degrees in any quality, and proportion in quantity or number. These are the only possible "objects of knowledge and certainty" (T 1.3.1.2). The "Variable Relations," in contrast, do *not* depend entirely on the ideas, and these are identity, relations of time and place, and causation.

Hume's example of an Invariable Relation is "the idea of a triangle" in which "we discover the relation of equality, which its three angles bear to two right angles; and this relation is invariable, as long as our idea remains the same" (T 1.3.1.1). Hume argues that *some* Invariable Relations "are discoverable at first sight, and fall more properly under the province of intuition than demonstration" (T 1.3.1.2). He explains that when "any objects *resemble* each other, the resemblance will at first strike the eye, or rather the mind; and seldom requires a second examination." When the difference in *degrees in quality* is considerable, we can also "pronounce at first sight" which one is superior or inferior "without any enquiry or reasoning" (T 1.3.1.2). We are able "at one view [to] observe a superiority or inferiority betwixt any numbers or figures; especially where the difference is very great and remarkable" (T 1.3.1.3).

As an example of an Invariable Relation that is known *intuitively*, consider the perceived resemblance between two red objects. If the same red objects remain unchanged, we perceive them as resembling each other. To perceive or conceive these two red objects *is* to perceive their resemblance. We can manipulate their spatial relation, but the resemblance remains if the objects do. When the difference is considerable, we can also perceive the Invariable Relation "larger than" between two objects. Again,

to perceive or conceive the objects *is* to perceive the difference in size. Invariable Relations depend solely on the ideas themselves. In contrast, that A is to the right of B does not at all depend on A and B. A and B remain unchanged when B is to the right of A.

Hume unfortunately does not clarify that what is known intuitively are relations between "mere" *ideas* and not relations between *bodies*. Suppose the two red objects mentioned above are tomatoes, but only one tomato is red. The other is green and only appears red because of the angle of light. Given that intuitive certainty is absolute and without possibility of error, we can't be intuitively certain of the red-resemblance between the two tomatoes. What we are absolutely certain of concerns appearances or bodies as they appear to us.[4] When Adam looks at the two tomatoes, there *are* two red objects in his visual field. And if Adam were to die at that moment, he would do so without having ever seen green.

Hume also fails to clarify sufficiently that the objects of knowledge cannot be ideas with conceptual content. If my idea of smoke includes its being an effect of fire, then I can't conceive the opposite, that smoke causes fire. Instead, we are supposed to "consider these objects in themselves, and never look beyond the ideas which we form of them" (T 1.3.6.1). Hume also refers to these ideas as "mere ideas" when he argues that the necessity of Causal Maxim does not arise from "reasoning from mere ideas; without which 'tis impossible to demonstrate the necessity of a cause" (T 1.3.3.3). Elsewhere, Hume insists that "there are no objects, which by the mere survey, without consulting experience, we can determine to be the causes of any other…" (T 1.3.15.1). The objects of knowledge are "mere ideas," and intuitive knowledge takes a "mere survey."

This brings us to Hume's remarks that the Invariable Relations can be perceived "at one view" or "at first sight." We may object that perceiving "at one view" is also possible with the Variable Relations. We can perceive "at one view" that A is on top of B. Thus, the immediacy suggested by phrases like "at one view" or "at first sight" cannot simply mean *seeing that* a relation holds. We can see that A is on top of B just as clearly and fast as we see that A is larger than B. Thus, what we perceive at one view in the case of intuitive knowledge is not *that a relation holds*; instead, I suggest, what is "seen" by the eye "or rather the mind" (T 1.3.1.2) is that the relation is *necessary*, or that *necessarily* the relation holds.

When Hume compares the Invariable Relations with the variable ones, he notes that "[t]he relations of *contiguity* and *distance* betwixt two objects may be chang'd merely by an alteration of their place, without any change on the objects themselves or on their ideas" (T 1.3.1.1) and he points out that there "is nothing in any objects to persuade us, that they are either always *remote* or always *contiguous*" (T 1.3.2.2). The Invariable

Relations "persuade" us that they *always* hold. In other words, that they are necessary. But how?

Consider Hume's reply to the question: what is "the difference between believing and disbelieving a proposition"? This is "easy to answer," says Hume, when a proposition is "prov'd by intuition or demonstration." And he explains: "In that case, the person, who assents, not only conceives the ideas according to the proposition, but is necessarily *determin'd to conceive* them in that particular manner" (T 1.3.7.3; my emphasis). Knowledge involves an absolute constraint on conception. As Hume remarks, it is *impossible* "for the imagination to conceive any thing contrary to a demonstration"; in contrast, with "reasonings from causation […] this absolute necessity cannot take place, and *the imagination is free to conceive both sides of the question*" (T 1.3.7.3; my emphasis). Knowledge is forced or determined conception. And in the case of the Causal Maxim, this forced conception is missing. Thus, "there is no absolute nor metaphysical necessity, that every beginning of existence" has a cause (T 1.3.14.35).

The category of "metaphysical" or "absolute" necessity is founded for Hume on the mind's *determination to conceive* in a certain way.[5] When the mind perceives that A is on top of B, it *feels free* to conceive a different spatial arrangement, but when the mind perceives two red objects, it is not free to conceive them as not resembling each other.[6] And of course it is not only "absolute necessity" that is founded on a determination of the mind, but also "causal necessity," although in the latter case the determination is only *strong* and not absolute as the imagination remains free to conceive otherwise. Consider the following passage:

> Thus as the necessity, which makes two times two equal to four, or three angles of a triangle equal to two right ones, lies only in the act of the understanding, by which we consider and compare these ideas; in like manner the necessity or power, which unites causes and effects, lies in the determination of the mind to pass from the one to the other.
>
> (T 1.3.14.23)

Absolute necessity is a determination to conceive ideas in a certain way. Causal necessity, or what Hume calls "physical necessity" (T 1.3.14.33), also "lies in the determination of the mind to pass from the one to the other." In sum, the concept of "necessity" in general is founded on a determination of the mind. I will argue shortly that possibility, in contrast, is founded on the liberty of the imagination. But first we must understand the nature of "clear and distinct" ideas, and to do so, I first identify the opposite: the unclear and indistinct ideas.

(Un)clear and (In)distinct Ideas

The first appearance of the Conceivability Principle in the *Treatise* occurs in the context of Hume's treatment of abstract or general ideas: "nothing of which we can form a clear and distinct idea is absurd and impossible" (T 1.1.7.6). But as Don Garrett observes, "Hume does not try to define them [the clear and distinct ideas] and so it remains somewhat uncertain exactly what he means by them" (2015, 48). Garrett suggests that the contrast might be Hume's "relative ideas," specifically ideas of relations between a known object and an unknowledge one—the idea of an external world is an example. But I don't think "relative ideas" are the unclear and indistinct ideas we are searching for, and Hume discusses them in a different section, later in Book 1 of the *Treatise*. I argue that the unclear and indistinct ideas we are pursuing appear instead a few paragraphs before the first statement of the CP:

> 'tis evident at first sight, that the precise length of a line is not different nor distinguishable from the line itself; nor the precise degree of any quality from the quality. These ideas, therefore, admit no more of separation than they do of distinction and difference. They are consequently conjoined with each other in the conception.
>
> (T 1.1.7.3)

There are a few striking features about this passage. First, Hume insists that there is no difference or distinction between the line and its length, but he does so by drawing the very distinction he denies. This prompts the key question of the sense in which there is supposed to be neither difference nor distinction in this case. The second and related feature is even more striking: Hume refers to the line and the length as *two* ideas; he says, "these ideas" and "they are." But if there are *two* ideas—conjoined or not—then they *are* distinguishable and separable. This follows from Hume's so-called Separability Principle: "whatever objects are different are distinguishable, and that whatever objects are distinguishable are separable by the thought and imagination… these propositions are equally true in the *inverse*" (T 1.1.7.3).

Hume recognizes the precariousness of the line/length distinction that is not supposed to be a distinction in the context of his discussion of "distinctions of reason": "Of this kind is the distinction betwixt figure and the body figur'd; motion and the body mov'd" (T 1.1.7.17). And he goes on to explain the difficulty:

> The difficulty of explaining this distinction arises from the principle above explain'd, that *all ideas, which are different, are separable*. For

> it follows from thence, that if the figure be different from the body, their ideas must be separable as well as distinguishable; if they be not different, their ideas can neither be separable nor distinguishable. What then is meant by a distinction of reason, since it implies neither a difference nor separation?
>
> (T 1.1.7.17)

The beginning of Hume's response is that "'Tis certain that the mind wou'd never have dream'd of distinguishing a figure from the body figur'd, as being in reality neither distinguishable, nor different, nor separable" and he maintains that the reason the mind draws such distinction is that it observes "that even in this simplicity there might be contain'd many different resemblances and relations" (T 1.1.7.18). He offers the following important example:

> Thus when a globe of white marble is presented, we receive only the impression of a white colour dispos'd in a certain form, nor are we able to separate and distinguish the colour from the form. But observing afterwards a globe of black marble and a cube of white, and comparing them with our former object, we find two separate resemblances, in what formerly seem'd, and really is, perfectly inseparable. After a little more practice of this kind, we begin to distinguish the figure from the colour by a *distinction of reason*; that is, we consider the figure and colour together, since they are in effect the same and undistinguishable; but still view them in different aspects, according to the resemblances, of which they are susceptible.
>
> (T 1.1.7.18)

As I interpret Hume's words, he is saying that the distinctions in question are not in the *object* or *idea itself*; they are not internal to the idea. The difference between the figure and the body comes, Hume explains above, from "observing afterwards," from "comparing," and from "practice." Adam's mind would never dream of distinguishing the figure from the body because there is no basis in the idea itself for such distinction; the idea cannot give rise to the distinction.

In the context of his treatment of the idea of time, Hume argues as follows: "since the idea of duration cannot be deriv'd from such an [unchanging] object, it can never in any propriety or exactness be apply'd to it" explaining that ideas "always represent the objects or impressions, from which they are deriv'd, and can never without a fiction represent or be apply'd to any other" (T 1.2.3.11). If it is not proper to apply the idea of duration to an object that can never cause the idea, it would seem that it is equally improper to apply a distinction to an idea that can never give

rise to the distinction. The idea itself contains or displays no difference or distinction between the line and its length or between the figure and the body. With experience, we learn to draw distinctions that we then apply to the ideas themselves and thereby believe falsely that there are such differences in the ideas. Another way of putting this is that length and line are distinct only in their capacity to belong to different "meaning sets."[7] For example, the meaning set of "line" includes objects that fall under the concept, namely lines. But "length" and "line" do not have identical meaning sets. Not every length is a line. There is, for instance, the length of time, and thus the meaning set of "length" will contain other objects that are not lines. A line is a member of two meaning sets, "length" and "line" (and many others). It is only in relation to other ideas within a given set that the idea of a line can be considered as a line or as a length.

If the "distinctions of reason" are our unclear and indistinct ideas, then clear and distinct ideas must be simple or complex, where the parts or simples of complex ideas are differentiated in the ideas themselves. And because the differences are internal to the ideas, the imagination can separate them easily. More on this below.

Conceivability and Metaphysical Possibility

If "necessity" is founded on a determination of the mind, then "possibility" is founded on the freedom of the imagination. And if the idea of necessity originates in a determination of the mind, the idea of possibility originates in a feeling of freedom or ease of mind. But this freedom, unlike the determination of the mind, is not a circumstantial property of the imagination; it is what the imagination most essentially or naturally is for Hume. And it is because freedom is the imagination's default or natural state that a constraint on this freedom, such as when it perceives Invariable Relations, is felt *immediately*.

As is well known, the so-called Copy Principle—that all simple ideas copy simple impressions—is Hume's most important and "first principle" (T 1.1.1.12) in his science of the mind. Hume considers "our second principle" in the science of mind to be "*the liberty of the imagination to transpose and change its ideas*" (T 1.1.3.4). Hume elaborates on this "Liberty Principle" below:

> The fables we meet with in poems and romances put this [the imagination's freedom] entirely out of question. Nature there is totally confounded, and nothing mentioned but winged horses, fiery dragons, and monstrous giants. Nor will this liberty of the fancy appear strange, when we consider, that all our ideas are copy'd from our impressions, and that there are not any two impressions which are perfectly

> inseparable. Not to mention, that this is an evident consequence of the division of ideas into simple and complex. Where-ever the imagination perceives a difference among ideas, it can easily produce a separation.
>
> (T 1.1.3.4)

The "liberty of the fancy" is nothing but the ability to separate what is differentiated and distinguishable in the (mere) ideas themselves and to produce new compositions. The liberty of the imagination is an "evident consequence" of the simple/complex distinction and these simple or complex ideas are the *clear and distinct* ideas at the core of the Conceivability Principle.

I noted at the beginning of this chapter that Ainslie rejects the "attributional" CP because he believes it requires an idea of possibility, which Hume does not have, according to him. But this is not true; we *do* have an idea of possibility, just as we have an idea of necessity. In the first *Enquiry*, Hume compares liberty with necessity as follows:

> liberty, when opposed to necessity, is nothing but the want of that determination, and a certain looseness or indifference, which we feel, in passing, or not passing, from the idea of one object to that of any succeeding one.
>
> (E 8.22n18.1)

The determination of the mind is the source of the idea of necessity, and the looseness we feel "in passing or not passing" from one idea to another is the source of the idea of possibility. Even without activity, there is a feeling of looseness or ease in the mind, and this is the impression of (metaphysical) possibility. In the last section of this chapter, I situate the CP (and knowledge/metaphysical necessity) within the context of Hume's overarching project in the *Treatise* and offer an interpretation. But first I want to discuss some objections against the CP in the literature, which will allow me to clarify and elaborate on my interpretation.

Objections and Replies

We saw earlier that Hume appeals to conceivability to reject the metaphysical necessity of a cause to every beginning of existence. Elizabeth Anscombe (1974) raises the following challenge for Hume:

> I can imagine a rabbit coming into being without a parent rabbit, well and good: I imagine a rabbit coming into being, and our observing that there is no parent rabbit about. But what am I to imagine if I imagine a rabbit coming into being without a cause? Well, I just imagine a rabbit

> coming into being. That this *is* the imagination of a rabbit coming into being without a cause is nothing but, as it were, the *title* of the picture.
> (Anscombe, 150)

The key claim in this passage, as I read it, is that there is no such thing as an idea of an uncaused object. But I don't think Anscombe is reading Hume correctly because in the text in question, he is only saying that when the mind conceives an object, it is not compelled to conceive another. Hume writes that it is easy for us to conceive any object to be non-existent this moment and existent the next, "without conjoining to it the distinct idea of a cause or productive principle" (T 1.3.3.3). However, the point Anscombe is making is still worth addressing on Hume's behalf: is there such thing as an idea of an uncaused object?

For Hume, the idea of an object does not contain a cause or the lack of a cause. But more generally, there is no such thing as an idea of x *without* y; after all, there are infinite "withouts." But this does not mean that an idea cannot *confirm the absence* of an object, including a cause. Hume is responding to rationalists who insist in reason's ability to identify a cause *as part of the idea* of an object. Hume denies *the presence* of such cause. Suppose you say, "this is a photo of Meryl at the Oscars *with* her award," but there is no award in the photo, and so I reply, "no, this is a photo of Meryl at the Oscars *without* her award." It is in this sense only that an idea can be of an object without a cause.

Mary Shepherd (1824) raises a different kind of challenge to the CP in response to the following passage from Hume's (first) *Enquiry*:

> it implies no contradiction, that the course of nature may change, and that an object, seemingly like those which we have experienced, may be attended with different or contrary effects. May I not clearly and distinctly conceive, that a body, falling from the clouds, and which, in all other respects, resembles snow, has yet the taste of salt or feeling of fire? Is there any more intelligible proposition than to affirm, that all the trees will flourish in December and January, and decay in May and June? Now whatever is intelligible, and can be distinctly conceived, implies no contradiction, and can never be proved false by any demonstrative argument or abstract reasoning *à priori*.
> (E 4.18)

Is Hume right that we can imagine salty and hot *snow*? For Shepherd, this is a case of "naming… [an] object in one sense, and imagining its essence in another sense" (*ERCE* 32) and she continues:

> were a body, in all other respects resembling snow, to have the taste of salt and feeling of fire, it would be an extraordinary phoenomenon,

> no doubt; and one which might for ought we know take place, but it would not be snow; and such a body could not fall from the clouds but by new causes efficient to its formation; it would, therefore, be entirely a different object, and would require a new name.
>
> (*ERCE* 68–69)

For Shepherd, "cold" and "tasteless" are part of the definition of "snow."[8] Thus, we cannot imagine *snow* that is hot and salty. But this argument only works if we assume that we know the definition of "snow." Thus, if you know that "bachelor" means "unmarried man," you cannot conceive a bachelor as married. The arguments against the CP from a posteriori metaphysical identities, such as water and H_2O, turn precisely on our ability to conceive water as something else, say XYZ, before knowledge of the identity. The objection is exactly that we *can* conceive water to be XYZ even though water is necessarily H_2O. We can do so by considering the "mere idea" of water. Shepherd too must allow that we can think *of* snow as hot and salty before we know the definition of "snow." If Adam's impression of "a body falling from the clouds" is of snow, then Adam thinks *of* snow that it can be hot and salty.

These cases are supposed to show that conceivability is not a guide to metaphysical possibility because what we are conceiving is metaphysically impossible (Putnam, 1975; Kripke, 1980). The core claim is that it is an a posteriori metaphysical necessity that water is H_2O. For Hume, however, there is no such thing as *a posteriori* metaphysical necessity. The identity of water and H_2O is at most a *physical* necessity, a concept that involves to the laws of nature. "Metaphysical necessity," unlike "physical necessity," is *a priori* for Hume.

A different objection to Hume's CP comes from mathematics: it is said that both the truth and falsehood of Goldbach's conjecture are imaginable. But if Goldbach's conjecture is true, it is necessarily true, and if it is false, it is necessarily false. Thus conceivability is not a guide to possibility. But we simply don't have a clear and distinct idea of Goldbach's conjecture; we can't have a clear and distinct idea of the infinite series of even numbers. And if we had such an idea, we would know its truth value. Goldbach's conjecture might challenge a different kind of conceivability principle, but not Hume's.

Van Inwagen (1998a, 79) wonders whether transparent iron is conceivable. If my perception of this transparent thing is of iron, then I can be said to conceive *of* iron that it is transparent. And there are other ways of thinking about the possibility of transparent iron, namely by expanding the meaning of "iron." Consider "liquid nails." Liquid nails perform the same function as traditional nails and if we decide that what is essential to being a nail is *not* being hard or metal, but rather its function, then *nails* can be liquid, and so, iron might very well be transparent.

Hsueh Qu (2023, 453) poses the following challenge to Hume's CP: "What is it to form an image of a bat being an animal, as opposed to a bat being a mammal?" His point is that there is no difference *in the image*. Qu is right, but his is not a challenge to Hume's CP because we don't have clear and distinct ideas of "mammal" or "animal." To identify the clear and distinct ideas, we must consider the "objects in themselves" and "never look beyond the ideas which we form of them" (T 1.3.6.1). Qu is looking beyond the ideas themselves. To conceive of x *as* a mammal, we must consider (the idea of) x as part of the meaning set of "mammal." On Hume's account of general ideas, no idea *on its own* has general signification. This does not mean, of course, that we cannot conceive of bats as animals; it only means that the sense of conceivability at play here is not the one relevant to Hume's CP.

The Mind as the Foundation of Science

Hume's goal in *A Treatise of Human Nature*, as he describes in its Introduction, is to establish a "compleat system of the sciences, built on a foundation almost entirely new, and the only one upon which they can stand with any security" (T Intro. 6). This foundation is Hume's "science of man," and he insists that "[t]here is no question of importance whose decision is not compriz'd in the science of man" and nothing that "can be decided with any certainty, before we become acquainted with that science" (T Intro. 6).

There is no modern equivalent for the "science of man" but the part of the science of man that is relevant to us is what Hume calls "logic": "The sole end of logic is to explain the principles and operations of our reasoning faculty, and the nature of our ideas" (T Intro. 5). The project is to apply the empirical and experimental method of reasoning of Bacon and Newton to the study of the mind. Hence the subtitle of the *Treatise*: "an attempt to introduce the experimental method of reasoning into moral subjects." Thus, it is the mind as it is revealed through the application of the experimental method of reasoning that will serve as the foundation for the other sciences.

Consider Hume's arguments against the infinite divisibility of space and time. (a) "'Tis universally allow'd, that the capacity of the mind is limited, and can never attain a full and adequate conception of infinity" (T 1.2.1.2). (b) "'Tis therefore certain, that the imagination reaches a *minimum*, and may raise up to itself an idea, of which it cannot conceive any sub-division, and which cannot be diminished without a total annihilation" (T 1.2.1.3). It is a question of fact for Hume whether space and time are infinitely divisible; thus, the question must be answered empirically. If we take a chunk of matter and start dividing it, we reach a point at which

an additional division deprives the mind of its object, that is, the mind no longer has an impression or idea of the object. Notice that it is irrelevant whether we start by dividing extension or, as Hume does, by dividing our ideas. The result is the same, namely that we reach a minimum *impression* or *idea*. The minimum idea is for Hume the standard of the smallest piece of matter:

> I first take the least idea I can form of a part of extension, and being certain that there is nothing more minute than this idea, I conclude, that whatever I discover by its means must be a real quality of extension.[9]
>
> (T 1.2.2.2)

As part of his examination of the "foundation of mathematics" (T 1.4.2.22), Hume demands:

> *What is our idea of a simple and indivisible point?* No wonder if my answer appear somewhat new, since the question itself has scarce ever yet been thought of. We are wont to dispute concerning the nature of mathematical points, but seldom concerning the nature of their ideas.
>
> (T 1.2.3.14)

Once we inspect this idea, we learn that it must have color or tactile properties. Similarly, in his criticism of geometry, Hume argues that "'tis absurd to talk of perfection beyond what these faculties [the senses and imagination] can judge of; since the true perfection of any thing consists in its conformity to its standard" (T 1.2.4.29). The standard in question is *our idea* of a line.

The grounding of the modal categories on the mind is part and parcel of Hume's ambitious project. The standard of metaphysical possibility is, in effect, the "Liberty Principle" which is an "evident consequence" of the simple/complex distinction. To say that a unicorn is metaphysically possible is not to say that such an animal might exist. Whether it is possible for such an animal to exist will depend on the laws of nature. To say that a unicorn is metaphysically possible is simply to say that its existence cannot be ruled out a priori, just as we cannot rule out a priori that an object might begin to exist without a cause. There is nothing in the clear and distinct idea of a unicorn that prevents its existence. And there is nothing in the clear and distinct idea of an object that prevents its beginning without a cause. What is ruled out a priori must be founded on a *determination to conceive*.

Hume makes the puzzling claim that the four Invariable Relations are "the foundation of science" (T 1.3.2.1). Perhaps Hume asserts this because these four relations serve as the standard of metaphysical necessity

(their invariability consisting in the determination of the mind to conceive in a certain way). The rationalist dogma that the necessity of the Causal Maxim is metaphysical simply fails to match the standard (there is no determination to conceive). The opposite of metaphysical necessity is metaphysical possibility. It is not just that we do not feel determined to conceive in a certain way in the case of the Causal Maxim, but also, and more positively, the imagination *feels free* to conceive differently. And that is the standard of metaphysical possibility.

Identifying (fixed and principled) *standards* against which we may assess various claims or philosophical theories is part of the foundational project Hume is engaged in. And Hume does establish the modal categories on a solid foundation. It is up to scientists to determine what is *physically* necessary or possible, and it is up to philosophers (or scientists of the mind) to determine what is metaphysically necessary or possible. For Hume, what is metaphysically necessary is extremely limited and what is metaphysically possible extremely expansive. And this gets things exactly right because in science, what is ruled out a priori should be as minimal as possible and what is considered a priori possible should be as expansive as possible.

Notes

1 References to the *Treatise* are to David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. David Fate Norton and Mary J. Norton (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), hereafter cited as "T" followed by book, part, section, and paragraph numbers.
2 References to *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, hereafter cited as "E" following by section and paragraph numbers.
3 Mill (1874), Book 2, Ch. 6, Section 6.
4 I discuss this fact about knowledge in more detail in Boehm (2013b).
5 This marks a slight but important departure from my views on this matter in Boehm (2013b), where I argue that at the sub-personal level, metaphysical necessity is founded on our incapacity to conceive differently, and I interpret this incapacity as the result of some activity of the mind: the mind tries but fails to conceive differently. In 2013b, I attribute the "determination to conceive" to a personal, phenomenological level of the mind. Because I now consider the imagination's default state to be freedom, I think the determination to conceive is all that is needed for knowledge of metaphysical necessities. Thomas Holden (2014) defends a similar but importantly different view of absolute necessity; he does not distinguish between the determination to conceive and the incapacity to conceive differently. I agree with him so long as the incapacity to conceive differently does not involve any extra step or activity of the mind. There is another important difference between our views: he interprets "metaphysical necessity" as reducible to or an *expression* of our incapacity to conceive differently or of

our being determined to conceive. Here I don't offer an expressivist account of metaphysical necessity or possibility. On my view, the determination to conceive is the standard of metaphysical necessity and for Hume, it is the only stable standard we can ever have. Whatever metaphysical necessity is (Hume does not need to battle with the rationalist or realist conception) we *do* need a standard by which we may assess claims about metaphysical necessity and if I am right, the determination to conceive is *our test* or *standard* for doing so. I believe this interpretation fits best with the "Foundational Project" I defend in Boehm (2013a).

6 This does not mean of course that the imagination cannot just separate the objects and thus relieve itself of the determined conception. But if it wants to consider the two objects, it *must* perceive them as resembling.

7 The literature refers to these sets as "revival sets," but I believe "meaning sets" is more descriptive and less misleading.

8 I discuss Shepherd's and Hume's views of necessity in Boehm, M, (forthcoming). "Shepherd and Hume: Experience and Necessity."

9 As I read it, Hume is not saying that the minimum idea gives us *access* to the real qualities of extension. He is, as it were, *declaring* that whatever properties the idea has must be a real quality of extension. (Minima only have sensible qualities. This is consistent with Hume's claim that our idea of extension is an array of color or tactile minima.)

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Part VIII

Moral Epistemology

13 Hume, Deontological Epistemology, and an Ethics of Belief

Hsueh Qu

13.1 A Deontological Epistemology

Hume's moral theory is widely viewed as a form of virtue ethics,[1] and in recent years commentators have begun to read his epistemology in similar vein.[2] Be as that may, there is a distinctly deontological aspect to his epistemology in the *Treatise*.[3]

First, Hume explicitly sets out rules governing the formation of our causal beliefs, via his 'Rules by which to judge of causes and effects' (THN 1.3.15). These have their roots in his discussion of 'philosophical' and 'unphilosophical' probability (THN 1.3.13.1). Unphilosophical probability involves, among other things, what Hume calls the 'first influence of general rules', which involves overgeneralisation (THN 1.3.13.12). This is corrected by the 'second influence of general rules', which involves taking 'a review' of the first influence, comparing it 'with the more general and authentic operations of the understanding' (*ibid*.). Regarding this second influence, Hume notes that 'we shall afterwards take notice of some general rules, by which we ought to regulate our judgment concerning causes and effects' (THN 1.3.13.11). These rules are explicitly revealed to be the 'Rules by which to judge of causes and effects' in THN 1.3.15. In this section, Hume sets out eight 'general rules', which allow us to know if two objects that seem to be causally related 'really are so' (THN 1.3.15.2); he describes them as 'all the LOGIC I think to employ in my reasoning' (THN 1.3.15.11). That Hume sees the following of rules as constituting a significant part of his epistemology certainly suggests a deontological aspect to this epistemology.

Second, Hume's discussion in 'Of scepticism with regard to reason' reveals epistemic obligations that he takes very seriously indeed—seriously enough to risk incurring doxastic apocalypse, at any rate. In THN 1.4.1, Hume considers a sceptical regress concerning reason. First, consider our knowledge of the demonstrative sciences. While in this domain 'the rules are certain and infallible', our employment of these rules are not (THN

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1.4.1.1.1). Given this uncertainty, Hume notes an epistemic obligation on our part to correct the first judgement by means of a further judgement:

> We must, therefore, in every reasoning form a new judgment, as a check or controul on our first judgment or belief.
>
> (THN 1.4.1.1)

Importantly, Hume's use of 'must' here seems clearly to indicate the presence of a normative obligation, rather than being a practical point—indeed, as Hume shortly explains, as a matter of psychological fact, we are unable to form further higher-order judgements past a certain point.

Given the fallibility of our faculties, 'all knowledge degenerates into probability' (THN 1.4.1.1). But Hume is not content to rest there. The obligation to correct our reasoning with further higher-order judgement applies equally to probable as well as demonstrative judgements:

> In every judgment, which we can form concerning probability, as well as concerning knowledge, we ought always to correct the first judgment, deriv'd from the nature of the object, by another judgment, deriv'd from the nature of the understanding.
>
> (THN 1.4.1.5)

To say that the further judgements are derived from the nature of the understanding rather than the object is simply to say that the further judgements concern the first-order judgement, rather than the content of the first-order judgement (i.e. what the first judgement is about). Again, the 'ought' in this passage cannot be read in a psychological or practical sense—Hume will shortly show that as a matter of psychology, this process has a terminus.

At every stage, Hume believes 'we are oblig'd by our reason to add a new doubt' (THN 1.4.1.6). Iterated indefinitely, Hume thinks doxastic extinction is the inevitable outcome. Thus, in light of these obligations, Hume recognises that

> all the rules of logic require a continual diminution, and at last a total extinction of belief and evidence.
>
> (THN 1.4.1.6)

Unlike his rationalistic opponents, Hume's account can explain why this annihilation of our beliefs does not in fact occur. According to Hume, '*belief is more properly an act of the sensitive, than of the cogitative part of our natures*' (THN 1.4.1.8). Past a certain point,

> the action of the mind becomes forc'd and unnatural, and the ideas faint and obscure'; tho' the principles of judgment, and the ballancing of opposite causes be the same as at the very beginning; yet their influence on the imagination, and the vigour they add to, or diminish from the thought, is by no means equal.
>
> (THN 1.4.1.10)

For our purposes, the key point is that Hume clearly recognises epistemic obligations to form higher-order judgements correcting our uncertain beliefs. 'We must' and 'ought always to' form these judgements, which 'oblige' us to add new doubt; these obligations thus 'require' the extinction of our belief. Notably, in circumventing the sceptical regress, Hume does not deny the force of these epistemic obligations to form further judgements. Indeed, he recognises that 'the principles of judgment' are 'the same' at any point down the line 'as at the very beginning' (THN 1.4.1.10). He only offers a psychological explanation for why we are not convinced by the further judgements that we are obliged to make, rather than a denial of the force of these epistemic obligations in the first place.

Third, and following from this, Hume likewise recognises epistemic obligations in the 'Dangerous Dilemma' in THN 1.4.7. Given that our cognitive faculties inevitably turn on the seemingly trivial actions of the imagination, Hume poses the question of 'how far we ought to yield to these illusions' (THN 1.4.7.6). The dilemma consists of two horns: the credulity horn, and the sceptical horn. The credulity horn is to 'assent to every trivial suggestion of the fancy', which leads to our believing 'errors, absurdities, and obscurities' (*ibid.*). On the other hand, the sceptical horn involves rejecting the trivial suggestions of the fancy, which we have seen leads to the extinction of our beliefs as per THN 1.4.1: we are obliged to make iterated higher-order judgements indefinitely that diminish our confidence to nothingness, and we only avert doxastic apocalypse due to our inability to follow overly rarefied reasoning past a certain point. Hume then laments: 'For my part, I know not what ought to be done in the present case' (THN 1.4.7.7). Again, Hume orients this sceptical problem around a structure of epistemic obligations: how much of the trivial actions of the imagination ought we to admit into belief formation?

Finally, consider what has come to be known as the 'Title Principle'[4]:

> Where reason is lively, and mixes itself with some propensity, it ought to be assented to. Where it does not, it never can have any title to operate upon us.
>
> (THN 1.4.7.11)

This principle seems to offer a solution to the Dangerous Dilemma: we can straddle both the credulity and the sceptical horns by admitting only those trivial propensities of the imagination that mix with our reasoning. And importantly for our purposes, the Title Principle is a rule governing our beliefs: we ought to believe something when it involves lively reason mixing with our propensities.[5]

13.2 Doxastic Involuntarism

We have seen that there is a strain of deontological epistemology that runs through Book 1 of the *Treatise*. In particular, Hume holds that there are obligations governing our beliefs and habits of belief formation: duties concerning our causal beliefs in THN 1.3.15, duties to form higher-order judgements when our initial judgements are uncertain in THN 1.4.1, duties regarding which of the trivial propensities of the imagination to admit into our belief-forming process in the Dangerous Dilemma, and duties concerning when to assent to reason in the Title Principle. However, taken in conjunction with Hume's doxastic involuntarism, a problem emerges. Briefly, if our beliefs and our belief-forming processes are involuntary, how can we be held accountable for them?[6]

Hume repeatedly endorses doxastic involuntarism—the view that our beliefs are beyond our voluntary control. He uses it as a premise in his argument that what distinguishes an idea from a belief cannot be an additional idea annexed to the former. The argument proceeds as a *reductio*: since the mind has freedom to combine ideas as it pleases, if this account of belief were correct, then belief would be voluntary; but belief is clearly involuntary; therefore, this account is false. In Hume's own words:

> The mind has the command over all its ideas, and can separate, unite, mix, and vary them, as it pleases; so that if belief consisted merely in a new idea, annex'd to the conception, it wou'd be in a man's power to believe what he pleas'd.
>
> (THN App 2)

Hume leans on this argument with remarkable consistency throughout his works: besides the appendix of the *Treatise*, the same argument appears in the *Abstract* (Abs 20–21) and the first *Enquiry* (EHU 5.10–11). Elsewhere, Hume states that mistaken beliefs are 'not generally suppos'd criminal' by 'moralists', because they are 'perfectly involuntary' (THN 3.1.1.12). Moreover, he compares beliefs with the passions as both being 'unavoidable' (EHU 5.8).

Why are beliefs involuntary for Hume? Hume argues that beliefs consist 'in a certain feeling or sentiment' that 'depends not on the will' (THN App

2). In this, the sentiment characteristic of belief is no different from other sentiments like anger or fear, which are likewise beyond my voluntary control. Since we cannot control this particular feeling that characterises belief, we cannot control when we believe or disbelieve.[7]

We have seen so far that for Hume, some beliefs or aspects of believing are subject to epistemic obligations, and that they are involuntary. When taken in conjunction with the plausible claim that 'Ought implies Can', we have a putative inconsistency. The contrapositive of 'Ought implies Can' is 'Cannot implies not-Ought'. Since beliefs are involuntary, it follows from this that they are not subject to epistemic obligations; thus, contradiction. This problem is most famously highlighted by Alston, who raises the question of how a deontological conception of epistemology can be possible if doxastic involuntarism is true, as it appears to be.[8] And the problem can be seen to extend beyond strictly deontological conceptions of epistemology, insofar as duties *per se* need not be involved for a problem to arise: it is equally puzzling how we can praise or blame someone for beliefs that are beyond their control, independently of any consideration of duties. Given Hume's commitments above, does he commit himself to inconsistency on this issue?

13.3 Prior Voluntary Action

How are we to resolve this conundrum? In contemporary epistemology, a common strategy is to point to the indirect influence we have over our beliefs.[9] In short, although we cannot directly control how we doxastically respond to evidence, there are other ways to influence our beliefs. For instance, we might choose to engage in more evidence-gathering—*exploratory* evidential conduct, in Audi's words.[10] Or we might attend to a particular set of evidence—something Audi refers to as *manipulative* evidential conduct.[11] Or we might choose to reflect more or less on the evidence in front of us.[12] Or we might reflect more on our previously-formed beliefs.[13] Or we might reflect on our own belief-forming processes, examining them for bias or prejudices.[14] And so forth. Importantly, all of these activities are within our voluntary control. The idea is that these voluntary actions are sufficient to ground a robust notion of doxastic responsibility, and thus a deontological epistemology.[15] Call this the 'Prior Voluntary Action' strategy.

There are a few ways that this strategy might resolve the problem at hand. First, it might be taken to imply that our doxastic obligations do not concern beliefs, but rather the prior voluntary actions that influence them. Audi gestures towards this in his suggestion of an '*ethics of inquiry*' rather than an ethics of belief[16]; Huss likewise points in this direction in promoting 'an ethics of belief that focuses on our ability to

practice indirect control'[17]; Levy and Mandelbaum similarly stress that our obligations primarily concern the indirect control we exercise over our beliefs.[18] Most explicitly, Levy agrees that we are rarely responsible for our beliefs; instead, it is the actions that influence them that we are responsible for.[19]

Alternatively, this strategy might be taken to indicate that beliefs are indirectly subject to doxastic obligations via the prior voluntary actions that ground them. For instance, Leon suggests that these actions provide 'a basis for taking us to be indirectly responsible for what we believe'.[20] Likewise, Stapleford suggests that any epistemic duties we have are 'best met through deliberation'.[21]

As the problem has not received much treatment in Hume's scholarship, there have been relatively little discussion of its solution. Among these few discussions, the Prior Voluntary Action strategy has undoubtedly emerged as the ubiquitous strategy.[22] Indeed, there is textual evidence for Hume recognising that our beliefs are subject to indirect influence in the ways suggested above.

Hume's Endnote H to EHU 9.5 enumerates explanations for differing reasoning abilities (between people and animals, and between different people).[23] Crucially, two of these explanations plausibly involve prior voluntary actions, for instance (7) having 'greater experience' of analogies (EHU 9.5n20.9), or (9) enlarging 'the sphere of… experience' (EHU 9.5n20.11). That said, it should also be recognised that the majority of the explanations Hume offers involve *involuntary* qualities: (1) powers of attention, memory, and observation; (2) largeness of mind; (3) ability to carry on a chain of consequences; (4) aptness to confusion when considering complexities; (5) attention, accuracy, and subtlety; (6) narrowness of mind; (8) biases.

In my view, a more promising textual basis is found in Hume's account of general rules in THN 1.3.13, which might be seen as a means of indirectly influencing our beliefs.[24] The most sophisticated account along these lines is defending by Hickerson, which leans on the 'second influence of general rules' (THN 1.3.13.12).[25] As we have seen, Hume thinks of the second influence of general rules as acting as a corrective to the first influence: the second influence takes 'a review' of the first influence, finding it to 'be of an irregular nature, and destructive of all the most establish'd principles of reasonings; which is the cause of our rejecting it' (*ibid.*). Thus Hume remarks:

> The following of general rules is a very unphilosophical species of probability; and yet 'tis only by following them that we can correct this, and all other unphilosophical probabilities.
>
> (THN 1.3.13.12)

Hickerson emphasises the *reflective* nature of the second influence: it reviews the first influence and thus involve higher-order reflection on our reasoning. Importantly, reflection, unlike belief, is voluntary—thus, the second influence is a plausible candidate for a voluntary basis for epistemic obligations.

There are two primary worries for the Prior Voluntary Action interpretation. The first is a general philosophical worry about the position from the contemporary literature. The second is a textual worry that is particular to Hume. In light of these worries, I reject the Prior Voluntary Action strategy.

The first concern, found in Feldman, as well as Chuard and Southwood, is that the Prior Voluntary Action strategy fails to account for synchronic norms of rationality.[26] Distinguish between diachronic norms of rationality, which concern beliefs relative to an extended time period (e.g. evaluations regarding evidence-gathering and the development of intellectual virtues); and synchronic norms of rationality, which evaluate beliefs relative to a given point in time (e.g. evaluations of evidence-responsiveness). The problem is that Prior Voluntary Action only seems capable of accounting for diachronic and not synchronic norms of rationality.[27] As Feldman puts it[28]:

> the control that we do have [over our beliefs] comes at the wrong point in the belief-forming process... The real worry is that epistemic evaluations have to do with how we respond to evidence, and we don't have voluntary control over that.

Be as this may, does *Hume* concern himself with synchronic norms of rationality? I argue that he does. Consider the Title Principle we examined above: we ought to assent to reason where it is lively and mixes with some propensity (THN 1.4.7.11). The Title Principle is clearly a norm of *synchronic* rationality: it sets out the conditions under which we are obliged to assent to reason at a given time (i.e. when it is lively and mixes with our propensities). Hume's 'Rules by which to judge of causes and effects' (THN 1.3.15) also concern obligations of how we should respond to causal evidence, rather than issues of evidence-gathering or the development of intellectual virtues. Finally, consider Hume's famous claim that 'a wise man... proportions his belief to the evidence' (EHU 10.4), which plainly concerns synchronic responsiveness to evidence. So Hume is certainly concerned with synchronic norms of rationality; if Prior Voluntary Action fails to account for these, so much the worse for it.

Chuard and Southwood develop this line of objection to Prior Voluntary Action, arguing that diachronic norms of rationality depend on synchronic

norms of rationality both empirically and normatively.[29] First, empirically, one cannot satisfy diachronic norms of rationality without satisfying synchronic norms of rationality. For instance, we can only effectively gather evidence if we satisfy the synchronic norm of being able to recognise evidence in the first place. Second, normatively, diachronic norms of rationality only have epistemic value insofar as the agent satisfies various synchronic norms. For instance, evidence-gathering is only of worth if the agent is appropriately responsive to the evidence.

Chuard and Southwood's objection goes further than Feldman's. *Even if* Hume is only concerned with diachronic norms of rationality (which we have seen above is untrue), this still presupposes a notion of synchronic norms of rationality that Prior Voluntary Action cannot rescue. Thus, Prior Voluntary Action fails as a solution.

The second concern with the Prior Voluntary Action interpretation is textual in nature, as stated above. The worry is that, in shifting the normative burden from beliefs onto the prior voluntary actions that ground them, we leave ourselves open to a vicious circularity. Crucially, Hume holds that actions are not subject to epistemic appraisal or obligations:

> Actions may be laudable or blameable; but they cannot be reasonable or unreasonable: Laudable or blameable, therefore, are not the same with reasonable or unreasonable.
>
> (THN 3.1.1.10)

Laudable and blameable are, for Hume, terms of moral appraisal; reasonable and unreasonable are terms of epistemic appraisal. Actions are strictly subject only to the former but not the latter. Hume is willing to recognise a figurative but strictly speaking false sense in which actions can count as reasonable or unreasonable (THN 3.1.1.12). Thus, if actions are indeed to be the grounds for our epistemic obligations, then they cannot be the *ultimate* grounds for them.[30]

But what then are these ultimate grounds? The grounds for the reasonableness or unreasonableness of our actions must come from either the belief or the passion which jointly produce the action. It cannot be the passion, because passions, like actions, cannot be strictly speaking reasonable or unreasonable themselves (THN 2.3.36; THN 3.1.1.12). As it turns out, Hume thinks that actions are derivatively reasonable or unreasonable in virtue of being associated with false beliefs:

> false judgments may be thought to affect the passions and actions, which are connected to them, and may be said to render them unreasonable, in a figurative and improper way of speaking.
>
> (THN 3.1.1.12)

It is not difficult to see that this leads to a vicious circle. If our beliefs are subject to epistemic obligations only via the prior voluntary actions that ground them, and these actions are only subject to epistemic obligations via their association with involuntary beliefs, then we are back at square one.

13.4 Rejecting Ought Implies Can

In my view, Hume avoids the contradiction set out in this chapter because he denies that 'Ought implies Can'.

In contemporary epistemology, denying 'Ought implies Can' is taken to be a difficult bullet to bite, since the principle is taken to have a great deal of *prima facie* plausibility.[31] Philosophers who pursue this path therefore make various attempts to soften the bullet. One way to do this is by offering a model for oughts that do not imply voluntariness. Wolterstorff compares epistemic oughts to 'paradigm oughts' describing what is to be expected, such as a doctor telling their patient that 'you ought to be able to dance again in six months'.[32] In earlier work, Feldman argues that we can have obligations we are incapable of fulfilling, such as an obligation to pay a debt.[33] In later work, Feldman instead argues that epistemic obligations are akin to 'role' oughts.[34] Role oughts 'describe the right way to play a certain role' and are founded on what constitutes 'good performance'; importantly, unlike some other roles, we do not have a choice whether to assume this role or not—'it is our plight to be believers'.[35] Such roles carry obligations, even ones that we might be unable to fulfil.[36] Kornblith argues that doxastic obligations should be construed as epistemic ideals, which are indifferent to what any individual believer can or cannot do, but which take into account human limitations in general.[37] Chrisman argues that we construe epistemic oughts as 'ought-to-be's concerning desirable states of affairs rather than 'ought-to-do's; the former, unlike the latter, do not imply any degree of control or influence on anyone's part.[38]

Similarly, there are many attempts that argue that the sense of 'Can' in 'Ought implies Can' is not one that implies voluntary control, thus allowing one to preserve a notion of 'Ought implies Can' while avoiding the putative inconsistency. Chuard and Southwood argue: 'the simple, yet fatal, mistake that besets Alston's argument… appears to result from conflating "can" (in its various guises) with "voluntary control" '.[39] In this vein, some commentators offer an account of control requires something like reasons-responsiveness rather than voluntary control. Thus, Ought might imply control in this sense, even if voluntary control is absent. For instance, McCormick takes the relevant notion of control to turn on 'reasons-responsiveness and ownership'.[40] Heller takes our beliefs to be free if they are accord with our self-endorsed belief-forming dispositions.[41] Steup argues that we can be responsible for those beliefs that proceed from

reason-responsive processes, which are non-accidental, and which we have a pro-attitude towards.[42] Other examples of this strategy include Shah and Hieronymi.[43]

Although some commentators have argued that Hume subscribes to 'Ought implies Can',[44] he never explicitly recognises this principle; much less does he accept it as intuitive or plausible. Indeed, the absence of decisive textual support aside, there are clear reasons for suspecting that Hume would have rejected such a principle had he considered it.

First, examine Hume's discussion of natural abilities in the moral realm. Hume argues that natural abilities such as 'a clear head', 'a copious invention', 'a profound genius', and 'a sure judgment' (THN 3.3.4.3) are to be treated on a par with the moral virtues, because, like moral virtues, they are qualities of the mind that are useful and/or agreeable to the self and/or to others. He anticipates an objection that natural abilities are involuntary. His first rebuttal is that moral virtues 'are equally involuntary and necessary' (*ibid.*). His second rebuttal is that considerations of voluntariness are irrelevant to moral evaluation, simply because our moral sentiments are not responsive to these considerations:

> I wou'd have any one give me a reason, why virtue and vice may not be involuntary, as well as beauty and deformity. These moral distinctions arise from the natural distinctions of pain and pleasure; and when we receive those feelings from the general consideration of any quality or character, we denominate it vicious or virtuous.
>
> (THN 3.3.4.3)

Hume makes the same point in an appendix to the second *Enquiry*:

> sentiments are every day experienced of blame and praise, which have objects beyond the dominion of the will or choice, and of which it behoves us, if not as moralists, as speculative philosophers at least, to give some satisfactory theory and explication.
>
> (EPM App 4.21)

In short, 'Ought implies Can' does not apply to moral evaluation. This gives us reason to suspect that it should not apply to the epistemic case either.

Indeed, Hume goes on to suggest that natural abilities are morally evaluable despite our lacking not only *direct control* but also *indirect influence* over them.

> Men have observ'd, that tho' natural abilities and moral qualities be in the main on the same footing, there is, however, this difference betwixt

> them, that the former are almost invariable by any art or industry; while the latter, or at least the actions, that proceed from them, may be chang'd by the motives of reward and punishment, praise and blame.
>
> (THN 3.3.4.4)

Both moral virtues and natural abilities are involuntary for Hume, as we have seen above. We cannot, at this moment, simply decide to be a more generous person, nor a more creative one. But natural abilities have the additional distinction that they are 'almost invariable by any art or industry', which suggests that they are resistant even to our indirect efforts to influence them. Despite this, Hume thinks natural abilities are no less subject to moral evaluation than moral virtues. It is not only direct voluntary control, but even indirect influence, that Hume finds irrelevant to moral evaluation; this is a final nail in the coffin of Prior Voluntary Action.

This is not to say that Hume denies the commonsensical fact that we do not typically judge involuntary actions as harshly as we do voluntary ones, or even at all. He thinks that we are certainly

> more accountable for those actions, which are design'd and premeditated, than for such as are the most casual and accidental.
>
> (THN 2.3.2.6)

But this reveals no deep commitment to anything like 'Ought implies Can'. Hume takes actions to be morally significant only insofar as they reveal underlying character (THN 3.3.1.4–5). Involuntary actions are typically poor indications of character, which is why we tend to discount them:

> The action itself may be blameable; it may be contrary to all the rules of morality and religion: But the person is not responsible for it; and as it proceeded from nothing in him, that is durable or constant, and leaves nothing of that nature behind it, 'tis impossible he can, upon its account, become the object of punishment or vengeance.
>
> (THN 2.3.2.6)

It is this empirical fact about the connection between actions and character, and not any abstract principle like 'Ought implies Can', that explains our forgiving attitude towards involuntary actions. And it is important to note an important distinction between beliefs and actions in this respect. While involuntary actions are poor indicators of our underlying moral characters, involuntary beliefs are excellent indicators of our epistemic characters. That someone unreflectively and involuntarily believes wild conspiracy theories is excellent indication that they are not a profound thinker.

One might respond by distinguishing between moral evaluation and moral obligation. Perhaps Hume thinks that we can *evaluate* an involuntary trait as virtuous or vicious, but we cannot oblige an involuntary action. The closest Hume comes to recognising anything like 'Ought implies Can' with respect to moral obligations is the following:

> No action can be requir'd of us as our duty, unless there be implanted in human nature some actuating passion or motive, capable of producing the action.
>
> (THN 3.2.5.6)

But a cursory examination reveals that this passage has little to do with voluntariness. Hume here claims that we can only require an action as a duty if human nature *in general* has a motive capable of producing the action. This of course allows for a particular person to be required to perform an action that they *individually* lack a motive for and are unable to perform. So this passage does little to motivate thinking that Hume holds 'Ought implies (voluntary) Can' with respect to our moral duties.

Given the above, it is highly suspect to assume that Hume maintains 'Ought implies Can' in the moral realm. It is even more suspect to think that he does so in the epistemic realm, particularly given the fact that (as noted above) involuntary beliefs, unlike involuntary actions, are excellent indicators of our underlying dispositions.

We have further reason to be suspicious of Hume's subscribing to 'Ought implies Can' in any realm at all, given his (in)famous 'is/ought' passage:

> In every system of morality, which I have hitherto met with, I have always remark'd, that the author proceeds for some time in the ordinary way of reasoning, and establishes the being of a God, or makes observations concerning human affairs; when of a sudden I am surpriz'd to find, that instead of the usual copulations of propositions, *is*, and *is not*, I meet with no proposition that is not connected with an *ought*, or an *ought not*. This change is imperceptible; but is, however, of the last consequence. For as this *ought*, or *ought not*, expresses some new relation or affirmation, 'tis necessary that it shou'd be observ'd and explain'd; and at the same time that a reason should be given, for what seems altogether inconceivable, how this new relation can be a deduction from others, which are entirely different from it.
>
> (THN 3.1.1.27)

Here, Hume points out that many of his contemporaries proceed blithely from empirical facts ('is' propositions) to normative claims ('ought' propositions). Hume challenges this transition, arguing that an explanation is

due for how we can get from one to the other. In light of this passage, the principle that we cannot proceed from 'is' to 'ought' has come to be known as 'Hume's Law'.

Now, Hume does not in this passage explicitly rule out such inferences but only questions them. Thus, there is some debate in the secondary literature regarding whether or not Hume genuinely rejects such inferences, or whether he is only extending a challenge for them. I lack the space to enter into this debate here, but I have argued that Hume does indeed endorse Hume's Law in THN 3.1.1.27 by drawing analogies between this passage and his ruling out the possibility of any argument for the Uniformity Principle.[45] Assuming I am correct, this passage gives us further reason to rule out Hume's endorsing 'Ought implies Can'.

Strictly speaking, THN 3.1.1.27 takes issue only with inferences that proceed from is to ought, whereas 'Ought implies Can' would be an inference in the reverse direction, from ought to is. Nevertheless, Hume rejects inferences from is to ought because he takes these relations to be 'entirely different' from each other, which would rule out inferences in both directions, insofar as 'entirely different from' is a symmetrical relation. Thus, if Hume does indeed endorse Hume's Law, then he cannot subscribe to 'Ought implies Can'. In light of the putative problem we examined in this chapter perhaps that is for the best.

Notes

1 See for instance Hursthouse (1999), Taylor (2006, 276), Costelloe (2007, 53), Cohon (2008, 161), Greco (2013), Garrett (2015, 264), Swanton (2015), Frykholm (2016), and Reed (2018).

2 E.g. Baceski (2013) and Schafer (2014); see also Vitz (2009) and Boyle (2012). For some seminal discussions of virtue epistemology in contemporary discussions, see Montmarquet (1987), Sosa (1993), and Zagzebski (1997).

3 (Qu, 2019a).

4 The significance of the Title Principle, named such in Garrett (1997), is a matter of some controversy. Many discussions have come to agree that the Title Principle is crucial to Hume's resolution of sceptical doubts in THN 1.4.7. See for instance Mounce (1999, 60), Garrett (2006), Allison (2008, 323–330), Meeker (2013, 73–81), Schafer (2014), Schmitt (2014, 368–375), Garrett (2016), Baxter (2018, 388–389), and Sasser (2021). I defend the significance of the Title Principle in the *Treatise* in my Qu (2014) and Qu (2020), although I argue it is absent from the *Enquiry* in my 2020 book and also Qu (2016).

5 I lack room to discuss this here, but I offer an account of why Hume is inclined to offer the Title Principle in the *Treatise* (and rescind it in the *Enquiry*) in my Qu (2020).

6 (Qu, 2017).

7 Williams (1973, Ch. 9) famously argues for doxastic involuntarism, as does Alston (1988); some more recent defences are Buckareff (2014) and Levy and Mandelbaum (2014). Hume's account of doxastic involuntarism is stronger than many contemporary accounts in taking *all* beliefs to be involuntary, unlike, e.g. Alston, who takes *most* beliefs to be involuntary. The weaker version is sufficient to motivate the puzzle, so long as there are some involuntary beliefs that are subject to obligations.
8 (Alston, 1988).
9 This position is defended by Kornblith (1983), Alston (1988), Dretske (2000), Audi (2001), Leon (2002), Audi (2008), and Huss (2009), among others. Peels (2017) suggests it as a promising route.
10 (Audi, 2008, 406).
11 (Audi, 2008, 405).
12 (Leon, 2002, 423), (Stapleford, 2015a, 1868).
13 (Kim, 1994).
14 (Leon, 2002, 423), (Levy & Mandelbaum, 2014).
15 It is important that the means by which we influence these beliefs are actions, which can be voluntary. For instance, Peels (2013) rejects a strategy of appealing to belief-policies: either they are beliefs, which are involuntary, or they are desires or the like, and cannot suitably influence beliefs.
16 (Audi, 2001, 105); Dougherty (2014) likewise stresses the ethics of enquiry, although his focus is not on doxastic involuntarism.
17 (Huss, 2009, 261).
18 (Levy & Mandelbaum, 2014, 30).
19 (Levy, 2007).
20 (Leon, 2002, 423).
21 (Stapleford, 2015a, 1868).
22 (Passmore, 1980), (Norton, 1982), (Norton, 1994), (Falkenstein, 1997), (Owen, 1999), (Norton, 2002), (Williams, 2004), (McCormick, 2005), (Hickerson, 2013).
23 (Falkenstein, 1997, 33), (Owen, 1999, 216).
24 (Falkenstein, 1997), (McCormick, 2005, 7–9), (McCormick, 2016, 84).
25 (Hickerson, 2013).
26 (Feldman, 2000), (Feldman, 2001), (Chuard & Southwood, 2009).
27 Reflection on already-possessed evidence is a bit of a corner case—it might be argued that such reflection is synchronic with our believing, or it might be argued that it occurs just prior to belief.
28 (Feldman, 2001, 83).
29 (Chuard & Southwood, 2009, 610–611).
30 One might, *contra* Hume, maintain that the ethics of belief is not epistemological but rather ethical in normative nature; see Dougherty (2014).
31 Although it might be denied that 'Ought implies Can' even holds in the moral case. Ryan (2003) argues that we should deny this principle in the epistemic case by arguing that we should reject it in the moral case, for instance. Other denials of 'Ought implies Can' in the moral case (independent of the epistemic case) include Sinnott-Armstrong (1984), Stocker (1971), and Saka (2000).

32 (Wolterstorff, 1997). However, Feldman (2001, 87) objects that this is because paradigm oughts carry no obligations whatsoever—thus, this move does little to explain how involuntary epistemic obligations are possible.
33 (Feldman, 1988).
34 (Feldman, 2000), (Feldman, 2001).
35 (Feldman, 2000, 676).
36 Although (Levy, 2007, 134) objects that role oughts are such that at least typical practitioners of the role are able to perform them, but no one has control over their beliefs. Peels (2014, 687) objects that roles only carry genuine obligations if they are voluntarily accepted, and thus role oughts still imply a degree of control; Chrisman (2008, 356) likewise suggests that role oughts cannot explain the categorical nature of doxastic obligations. Stapleford (2015b, 87) suggests that our believing seems to come with duties, unlike many role oughts, and so something more seems to be going on in the case of belief.
37 (Kornblith, 2001, 238). An objection to this view is that *no one* has any control over their beliefs; see Chrisman (2008, 357) and Peels (2014, 688).
38 (Chrisman, 2008). Peels (2014) raises the question of whether 'ought-to-be's' carry any genuine obligations; if not, then this account fails to account for our seeming doxastic obligations.
39 (Chuard & Southwood, 2009, 619).
40 (McCormick, 2016, 112).
41 (Heller, 2000).
42 (Steup, 2012).
43 (Shah, 2002, 443), (Hieronymi, 2008, 362–363).
44 Wilson (1997, 202), Morris (2000, 105), and Ridge (2003, 172).
45 (Qu, 2019b).

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14 Natural and Artificial Epistemic Virtues

Sarah Wright

Contemporary virtue epistemology is split between those who focus on reliabilist and those who focus on responsibilist virtues. Reliabilist virtues are faculties or methods of an individual that lead to the formation of a high proportion of true-to-false beliefs. Responsibilist virtues, on the other hand, are character traits of an individual that are adopted and refined out of a love of epistemic goods. These character traits reflect well on those who possess them and are seen as elements of a good overall cognitive life.

Although there are reliable character traits that both accounts would recognize as epistemic virtues, these two accounts will disagree about many cases. The reliabilist recognizes faculties as epistemic virtues; on their account, good eyesight can count as a virtue. Responsibilists balk at this characterization because eyesight does not seem like a traditional virtue. It does not reflect well on the person who possesses it, as a virtue should.

On the other hand, responsibilists recognize as epistemic virtues some character traits that are either not locally or not globally reliable. Open-mindedness is a central responsibilist epistemic virtue, yet it can lead those who possess it to form false beliefs when they are in aversive epistemic environments where others are trying to mislead or undermine them. In these contexts, closed-mindedness (classically thought a vice) might be a more reliable way to form beliefs.[1] Creativity is often considered an epistemic virtue. Our epistemic "heroes" are often those who saw and made revolutionary changes in the understanding of a particular field. But creativity itself doesn't seem to aim at truth and isn't a reliable way to form beliefs. Just thinking creatively is likely to lead to a wide range of novel answers, the majority of which are not true. So reliabilist criteria must reject both creativity and open-mindedness as epistemic virtues.

One response to this conflict between the accounts is simply to allow that we have two concepts of epistemic virtue and develop each on its own.[2] However, there are also attractions to developing a unified account

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of the virtues, and that will be my aim here. I will be applying the Humean distinction between the natural and artificial virtues, along with Hume's shared criteria for both, to try to resolve the tension and present a novel account of epistemic virtues. This view takes its inspiration from Hume's account of the virtues, but I am not arguing (as others have done) that Hume actually has a virtue epistemology.[3] Instead, I am showing how Hume's moral theory could be applied to contemporary virtue epistemology. I will end by developing an epistemic sense view based on Hume's sentimentalism and moral sense view.

14.1 Natural Virtues

How exactly to spell out Hume's distinction between the natural and artificial virtues is a point of some contention in Hume scholarship. I will be following James Fieser's way of working out the distinction because he ties it to the source behind the motivation for each. When worked out, I hope we'll see that this provides a nice parallel with reliabilist and responsibilist conceptions of epistemic virtue, and so also shows a way that we can conceive of both types of virtues as complementary.

Fieser explores the distinction by starting with some prerequisites for virtue given by Hume. While Hume sometimes uses the term "virtue" loosely, when he is being careful, he insists that virtues must be durable traits of a person, not actions or passing passions; the same action can be virtuous or vicious, depending on the motivation, and passing passions are too fleeting and not under our control to qualify as virtues. Once Hume requires durability, only *instinctive traits* or *intensions* are real candidates to be virtues. Between these two, Hume identifies natural virtues with those *instinctive traits* of which we approve or feel approbation. Instinctive traits for Hume are either instinctive bodily appetites/impulses or instinctive mental passions. Instinctive bodily appetites include obvious candidates like hunger, thirst, and lust, but also things that don't seem bodily. These natural impulses or instincts include a desire for happiness for our friends. So, generosity to our friends is then a natural virtue arising from natural impulses, even if informed by reason.

In contrast, instinctive mental passions include some cognitive elements but are still candidates to be natural virtues. For example, acting on love of our offspring requires both that we know who our offspring are and that we know what is helpful or healthy for them. In this case, we use means–ends reasoning to direct and enable our natural desires. So our informed care for our children is still a natural virtue.

We can also refine our natural passions through sympathy. We have a natural instinct to desire well-being for our friends. We feel their pains and frustrations similarly to the way we feel our own. But this concern for

others is limited by our social connections. It can be expanded to a more general generosity, applying outside our circle of friends, when we take up the "general point of view." I can understand that others care about a stranger's well-being, even if I don't know him. And this leads me to value his well-being through sympathy with his own circle of friends as well as sympathy with the stranger himself. Glathe calls these "secondary natural virtues" because they are developed from instinctive traits but made more general through sympathy.[4] Both instinctive traits and sympathy are natural, so these are still natural virtues.

14.2 Epistemic Analog of Natural Virtue

What is the epistemic analog of Hume's natural virtues? To answer this question, we should note that Hume's distinction between the natural and artificial virtues depends on the source of their motivations. This is why Hume settles on the instinctive traits that motivate either bodily or mentally. Both motivate directly; we see a thing as instinctively desirable, even if that motivation is directed cognitively through knowledge we bring to bear. To find an epistemic analog, we should be looking for ways of forming beliefs that are instinctively trustworthy and which we find easily motivating us to believe.

One candidate here is the trait of curiosity. Karl Schafer, who treats Hume as offering a fully developed virtue epistemology, suggests that curiosity is the central epistemic virtue.[5] Ever since Aristotle, curiosity has been thought to be an instinctive human trait, and curiosity seems naturally motivating. It drives us to search out information and can lead us to be quite tenacious in that search. While curiosity is motivation, we should note that we come to instinctively have many beliefs that we have no curiosity about. I walk outside and believe that the sun is shining and it is hot; this happens even when I'm not the least curious about the weather, and am thinking about other topics.

This example gives us reason to think that our trust in our *faculties* is an even more basic instinctive trait than curiosity and, therefore, a better candidate for natural virtues. Our faculties are clearly a natural feature of our bodies, and we have a natural impulse to trust them. They look like instinctive bodily appetites/impulses. Of course, we don't talk about our faculties motivating us in the way that other bodily appetites do. But those appetites motivate us to act, while the faculties are impulses that lead us to believe. Just as it is hard to ignore one's hunger or thirst, it is hard to entirely ignore one's sight. Even when we know we are looking at a visual illusion, the appearance that one line is longer than the other is still instinctively attractive. As with hunger and thirst, it takes effort to ignore this natural impulse, even when it is possible.

But what of "instinctive mental passions" and the way they can be "secondary natural virtues"? A good candidate here would be the more nuanced ways we come to regulate our use of our faculties. Just as we can refine our generosity, extending it more broadly, we can also refine our use of our faculties. So, while we naturally trust our eyesight, we can refine that trust as we learn about our limitations. When we are in bad lighting conditions, don't have our glasses on, or are viewing a known visual illusion, we can learn not to trust our eyesight. This might be the analog of not giving our child a further sugary treat, even though we know that they want one. There is a natural desire to make them happy, but it is tempered with the knowledge of how that further sugary treat will make them behave and feel. In addition to restraining our natural impulses, we can also improve them, as we do in the case of expanded generosity. Here, we may learn to improve our vision by putting on glasses, turning on lights, or asking others what they see. The natural epistemic virtues can be developed and refined through our observations about when they are best used and how they might be augmented.

Connecting back to contemporary virtue epistemology, we can note that the faculties and scientific methods that refine our use of the faculties are also exactly the traits of a person that are central examples of Reliabilist epistemic virtues. On many epistemic theories, our sensory faculties are viewed as epistemically basic. One of the original motivations for reliabilism as a general epistemic view was to defend our trust in our faculties in a non-circular manner, and to extend that trust to (scientific) methods. Natural virtue applied to the epistemic realm leads to a focus on the same basic processes for knowledge acquisition.

14.3 Artificial Virtues

Turning to the artificial virtues, Fieser (1997) argues that they are the *intentions* that we approve of, in contrast to the instinctual traits of natural virtues. As we saw above, both are sufficiently durable to serve as virtues, but Fieser argues that artificial virtues cannot be instinctive traits because (following Hume's distinction), they are not approved of everywhere. Artificial virtues are not motivated directly by any instinctive bodily appetite or mental passion; if they were, then they should be approved of everywhere, as generosity is. Instead, intentions must be the motivator here. Hume says, "[T]he actions themselves are artificial, and are perform'd with a certain design and intention" [T 475]. Artificial virtues come from reasoning about how conventions can help benefit everyone.

Hume gives material honesty as one example of the artificial virtues. Rules about property ownership are artificial; they vary from culture to

culture. And we are not drawn to follow the rules about property ownership by any bodily appetite; to the contrary, we often naturally want what others have for ourselves. But we also realize that if everyone were simply to take others' possessions whenever we wanted, we would not be able to trust others and we would not be able to gain the benefits of cooperation. We can achieve far more through cooperation than we can individually, so it is rational for us to abide by the restraints of material honesty. This is an indirect motivation that takes its force from our natural desire for the benefits of cooperation and living in a stable community.

Once we have worked through this example, we can see another reason that material honesty cannot be a natural virtue. It is not motivated by a single bodily appetite, nor is it the refinement of a bodily appetite or metal passion. Material honesty is motivated by a range of these, depending on the circumstances. In the case of fair exchanges, I might get my basic food needs met through making a deal with the baker. Respecting the possessions of others allows me to form friendships with them, meeting my needs for companionship. And I can meet the needs of my children by living in a society that allows me to trust their teachers and doctors. So there is no single instinctual trait that motivates material honesty. Instead, it is motivated through a multitude of instinctual traits, supplemented by reason, to form an intention.

Further, we should note that while the argument above looks quite instrumentalist, Hume gives a model on which we internalize the value of these virtues. We start off practicing material honesty out of self-interest. We don't like having to respect the property of others, but "when men observe, that 'tis impossible to live in society without restraining themselves by certain rules" (T533), they are motivated to follow those rules. Further, Hume notes that after we accept a system of property, following its rules becomes natural for us; "the public instructions of politicians, and the private education of parents, contribute to the giving us a sense of honour and duty in the strict regulation of our actions" (T 533–4). Thus, we can develop the artificial virtues through practice and education.

Note that the terms and discourse we use to inculcate the artificial virtues in Hume's view include the use of "thick terms" that are central to virtue theory in general. Calling someone honest is both to praise their character and to tell an audience what kind of behavior we can expect from them. To fully understand the term, one must take on the positive evaluation. Other uses end up being thinly referential; it is no praise to call someone "honest." We are encouraged to develop the character trait of honesty in the very process of learning what the term means, and this explains how we are motivated to develop the artificial virtues.

14.4 Epistemic Analog of Artificial Virtue

What are the epistemic analogs of Hume's artificial virtues? We can begin by noting that we should not expect the artificial virtues, unlike the natural virtues, to make use of a single faculty. Rather, they are more likely to be like responsibilist's central case of virtue, using multiple faculties in different contexts. Responsibilist virtues are traits of character, like open-mindedness, and so are not related to a specific faculty; rather, open-mindedness will use many different sources, e.g., vision, hearing, memory, and testimony.

Open-mindedness is also like material honesty, both in that it must be learned and in that it depends on context. Our more instinctive desires are often to be closed-minded, particularly in cases where we have already formed an opinion. We might even say we have an instinctive mental passion to hold on to our beliefs once they are formed. Open-mindedness isn't natural to us, but it does help us to do better than we can if we are closed to new information. Yet a specific degree of open-mindedness is only a virtue against a backdrop of convention. As with material honesty and the different property regimes, there are also many different possible ways to set up the division of epistemic labor; our particular division is artificial and arbitrary. Our epistemic institutions could be more individualistic or more collectivist, with more division of labor. There might be reasons to make this choice in one way or another, but once we set up epistemic institutions, all can benefit from cooperation. And this would call for different intentions to uphold the institution.

Our particular epistemic institutions will also determine which thick terms we use positively. In a context where we have reason to trust others, open-mindedness will be praised, and our parents and educators will encourage us to be open-minded. In a culture that is more cut-throat, we might call that the same degree of openness to the ideas of other gullibility. In both cases, the larger culture is encouraging us to develop an epistemic character trait, and through this education, we are motivated to develop them. Being open-minded seems noble and public-spirited, or being gullible seems foolish. In either case, the evaluative part of the thick term both tells us which epistemic character traits to develop and motivates us to develop them.

Note that thinking of (at least some) responsibilist virtues as artificial epistemic virtues can help to resolve an issue that motivated the original turn to Hume for insight; that some responsibilist virtues are not locally or even globally reliable. But understood as artificial virtues, we should not expect these epistemic virtues to "be approved of everywhere," and that can be explained by the fact that they are not reliable everywhere. Compare this to taking one's virtue of material honesty from a

collectivist society and trying to use it in an individualist one. Following one's home cultural rules, one may take fruit from an orchard when one is hungry or give away the food in someone else's pot to a beggar. Virtues at home may be vices elsewhere. So, the context-sensitivity of artificial virtues can help explain why they only sometimes and in some places appear as virtues.

This context-sensitivity can be applied to epistemic virtues and the way that they also depend on the epistemic institutions one finds oneself in. Open-mindedness is a great way to learn in environments set up to support us, but in aversive ones, it just looks like gullibility. In the right context, open-mindedness is reliable; it just isn't always locally reliable. Even the epistemic virtues that are not globally reliable can be explained in the artificial virtue framework. Creativity itself rarely leads to truth. But in the context of a particular stable epistemic institution, some creativity is needed. We might think of normal science as making slow progress and the need for occasional creative insight to spur a scientific revolution. Within this context, creativity increases the reliability of the total belief-forming process; it helps the community make progress. So even if creativity isn't a virtue everywhere, it is an essential virtue sometimes – a perfect fit for the artificial virtue framework.[6]

14.5 Hume's Second Distinction

These last comments on open-mindedness and creativity focus on their reliability, and this leads to a second way that Hume marks the distinction between the natural and artificial virtues. Rather than focusing on the motivation behind the virtues, it looks at their outcomes.

> The only difference betwixt the natural virtues and justice lies in this, that the good, which results from the former, arises from every single act, and is the object of some natural passion: Whereas a single act of justice, consider'd in itself, may often be contrary to the public good; and 'tis only the concurrence of mankind, in a general scheme or system of action, which is advantageous.
>
> [T 579]

Natural virtues are always beneficial for their possessors, but artificial virtues are not. This helps us to explain why certain instances of artificial virtue look unjust. The hungry urchin who steals bread is acting against the virtue of material honesty; he is taking what is not his and disrespecting the property rights of his society. Still, stealing the bread is clearly beneficial for him. The urchin who displays material honesty is acting in a way contrary to his own good and plausibly contrary to the public good.

Of course, the epistemic analog of this second way of drawing the distinction between types of moral virtues would have to take on a probabilistic character. Even the highest reliabilist criterion for epistemic virtues requires that they are reliable in forming true beliefs, not that they form true beliefs in every instance. And, if we take a skeptical view, we might even doubt Hume's claim that good arises from every single act of natural moral virtue. My natural generosity might cause me to buy a present for a friend, but if I accidentally give pants a size too small, they might not please the recipient at all. Still, this looks like natural generosity. So, requiring success in each instance is probably too strong a standard, even for moral virtues. Still, they do seem to be reliable in bringing about good results; generosity is generally beneficial for those it targets.

Once we recognize this limitation, we can connect the second Humean distinction to reliability in the moral and epistemic virtues. Natural moral virtues reliably produce good results. Natural epistemic virtues reliably reach the truth. But artificial epistemic virtues may not be reliable in the same way. Particularly when they are used without the support of the social structure they are designed for, artificial moral virtues can reliably harm others (e.g., giving what isn't ours in a local property regime), and artificial epistemic virtues can reliably produce false beliefs (e.g., open-mindedness in hostile environments).

14.6 What Makes a Virtue a Virtue for Hume

However, focusing on this second way of making the distinction runs the risk of just leading us back into the reliabilist/responsibilist debate we began with, just not with Humean labels. The solution to this worry is to recognize that Hume's comments about reliability should not be treated as criteria for the natural and artificial epistemic virtues. Rather, they are empirical generalizations Hume makes about the categories, but those categories are distinguished in another way.

This is why Fieser's way of drawing the distinction between natural and artificial virtues is so helpful, because it distinguishes based on the sources of motivation between the two kinds and does not focus on the outcomes of the virtues, as the reliabilist does.

Hume's criterion for virtue is the same for both natural and artificial virtues.

> The hypothesis we embrace is plain…It defines virtue to be whatever mental action or quality gives to a spectator the pleasing sentiment of approbation; and vice the contrary.
>
> [E 289]

Approbation from the spectator is the criterion for virtue and vice. Not all things we feel approbation toward are virtues, since we might feel approbations toward one-off actions and even objects. Virtues must be durable traits of the individual, and this is the conclusion of the durability argument above. Further, we should notice that the relevant approbation should not be too self-centered or passing. Of course, I'm pleased when someone brings me a piece of my favorite cake, but I can recognize that my personal joy at receiving cake is not the relevant kind of approbation for judging something as serious as virtue and vice. Instead, Hume insists that we take up the "general point of view" and consider the feelings and reactions of others as well. Putting this all together, we can say that virtues are durable traits of the individual that evoke approbation from the general point of view.

This definition shows why Hume's view is called a moral sense view. Moral sense (approbation from the general point of view) in the evaluator is the sole criterion of virtue. Of course, different traits evoke approbation in different ways. After all, natural virtue evokes approbation in all contexts, while the evaluation of artificial virtues depends on context. But this does not make them competing categories or generate competing criteria. Natural and artificial virtues are evaluated by the same criterion (which depends on reactions of the spectator), while at the same time we can make sensible and useful distinctions between them (based on the ways that agents are motivated to display them). So natural and artificial virtues are complimentary parts of the moral sense view.

Since approbation by the moral sense is the criterion for virtue in this view, it is important to understand how we develop our sentiments/our moral sense. This is a separate, but related, question to that explored in the sections on the natural and artificial virtues above. There, we articulated Hume's views on how natural and artificial virtues are developed and extended those to the epistemic virtues. Here, though, we are focusing on how we can develop the source of moral (and epistemic) judgments in the spectator – the criterion against which we must evaluate character traits.

For the natural virtues, we can note that the same mechanisms of means/ends reasoning and sympathy can help us develop our moral sense. As a very simple example, we might imagine our evaluation of the case above, where someone lets their children eat too much candy. This behavior might evoke approbation from a simplistic point of view. The parent is doing something kind for the child. But observing the scene a little longer or knowing the predictable effects of eating too much candy, we can see the undesirable result – the child has a stomachache. Our moral sense can then be developed so that we approve of the parent who moderates their child's consumption. In addition to means end reasoning, sympathy and the "general point of view" also develop our moral sense. When I hear of

a historical figure who was known for his generosity, I might not immediately admire him. After all, I'm not the recipient of his largess. But I can put myself in the shoes of those in his community, through an exercise of sympathy, and approve of his generosity to others from the general point of view.

Note that taking the general point of view is not just an exercise of reason, reasoning from my own case to that of others. Rather, through sympathy, I feel the concern that others have for those they interact with. This is more than a cold reason; it also gives me motivation to care about those in the circle of others. So my approbation of character traits from the general point of view depends not only on the interests of those near and dear to me. I can approve of character traits in people I will never meet by recognizing the reactions that those around them will have of their character.

Artificial virtues are developed by the same mechanisms that help us develop the natural virtues; they also help us develop our moral sense as it approves of these virtues. The very same mechanisms of public discourse that teach me to develop the artificial virtues also teach me to evaluate them positively. These virtues are described in thick terms where the evaluation is built in. Thick terms, once understood, point out features that we have reason to develop. They also point out features that we should approve of.

14.7 An Epistemic Sense View

Often, the criterion of the epistemic is taken to be truth alone. We say that belief aims at truth, and so truth is the mark of good belief. We might take this as a short and direct argument for reliabilism, insofar as true belief is the epistemic goal and truth cannot be perfectly attained.[7] In contrast to this, responsibilists emphasize a plurality of other epistemic values, e.g., knowledge, understanding, and rationality. As soon as we recognize more than one kind of epistemic value, we cannot use a single-valued criterion or standard for epistemic virtues. Rather, we have to balance values against each other.

As a standard against which to judge this balance, eudaimonist responsibilist virtue theorists use fit into a good (cognitive) life as a criterion for epistemic virtues. Following the eudaemonist tradition in virtue theories, we can use the good life as a standard for virtues; virtues are those character traits that are essential to having a good overall life. This same standard can be applied to the epistemic virtues. Character traits involved in reasoning are virtues insofar as they contribute to or are essential to a good epistemic life. The eudaimonist view allows a balance of a number of epistemic values because a good epistemic life involves truth, knowledge, understanding, and rationality.

While the eudaimonist account can help us adjudicate between competing values in selecting virtues, there are also those who are not comfortable with the eudaimonist framework. It seems to depend (at least in its ancient form) on a teleological assumption about purposes. Aristotle (and other ancient philosophers) came to the conclusion that eudaimonia is the highest human good through an argument that takes a dilemma structure. They rule out other candidates for the highest human good and come to the conclusion that only the eudaemon life can fill this role. But these arguments depend on the assumption that there is a shared human good and the assumption that this good must be singular. These two assumptions were universally made in the ancient world, but contemporary virtue theorists might balk at them.

An epistemic sense view, built on the model of Hume's moral sense view, would provide an alternative with many of the desirable features of the eudaimonist view. The epistemic sense view would allow us to recognize a wide range of values and virtues, though they would not be basic values. Epistemic virtues would be the durable epistemic traits that we admire from the general point of view. We admire many epistemic traits, and these don't have to conflict if admiration itself is the criterion for a trait's being a virtue, as the epistemic sense view holds.

As with the moral sense view, the central role of the epistemic sense as a criterion for virtue may lead us to reasonably wonder how our epistemic sense is developed. Fortunately, our comments above show how the same mechanisms that develop our moral sense can be used to explain the development of epistemic sense. With respect to the natural virtues, just as we learn to regulate the use of our faculties, we also admire those who learn to do so. They are using means–ends reasoning to improve their natural faculties, and we generally approve of good use of those faculties. And our admiration for the artificial epistemic virtues is first accepted on instrumental grounds but then inculcated through thick terms like open-minded, creative, curious, careful, etc. As noted above, the specific thick terms in our culture will depend on our epistemic institutions, and those terms, once internalized, will drive the evaluation of the durable epistemic traits of others.

In addition to Hume's mechanisms of the development of our moral sense and even the thick terms of the traditional virtue theorist, we can also consider the chaining mechanisms of admiration and trust that Linda Zagzebski explores in her book on authority.[8] She starts with self-trust as a kind of bedrock, without which we cannot make any judgments. But soon we will recognize our need to trust at least some others. We cannot learn everything for ourselves, and others seem to know far more than we do. But which others should we trust? We can extend our circle of trusted others in the same way if we learn which character traits to develop. We

start with people that we know personally. Some of them have character traits we admire, and we aim to develop those traits. And those that we admire also admire others; they tell us about their greatness and hold those others up as exemplars. As a result, we come to admire those people and are motivated to develop the character traits that they possess. Zagzebski does not use Hume's language, but we can see a mechanism of sympathy here; I am infected by the admiration of people that I trust. I put myself in their shoes and am as motivated as they are. Zagzebski's account allows us to "feel" the reaction of others to the character trait and respond accordingly.

14.8 Benefits of an Epistemic Sense View

14.8.1 Explains How and Why We Are Motivated to Develop Virtues

One of the central advantages of both the moral and epistemic sense views is that they offer an explanation of the psychological mechanisms by which we are motivated to develop the virtues, both moral and epistemic. In any virtue epistemology, once we have identified the epistemic virtues, we face a question similar to that common in metaethics. Even if I recognize an action as good, what motivation do I have to actually perform that action? In the virtue theoretic framework, this becomes a question about virtues. I might recognize that generosity or open-mindedness are virtues, but what then motivates me to develop these virtues?

The reliabilist model of moral and epistemic virtues has little to say here, other than appealing to motivations they assume that everyone has. They assume that everyone has a desire for truth. This might be further motivated by looking at the role truth plays in our making plans and acting in the world.[9] But even if we want truth in general, there are many truths that we don't want, since they would just be useless clutter for us. Even focusing on the facts that we do care about, there is a persistent question of whether we need truth or just near-enough beliefs. So long as we try to argue for the value of truth on the basis of our desire for action, there will be many further steps in need of support.

On the other hand, responsibilist virtue epistemologists often insist that character traits are only virtues if they are appropriately motivated by a love of truth, understanding, or some other epistemic value.[10] While responsibilists are more open about the nature of the epistemic values that motivate us, the story about how we develop these traits is more complex. Those who use an Aristotelian framework insist that we find models in our community and practice following their behaviors. This picture is psychologically realistic in that it mimics learning skills. But there is still a serious

question about the motivations behind that learning, particularly if we cannot find a fully virtuous person to model.

On the epistemic sense view, the motivation for developing the virtues is much more direct. We want to develop virtues because we admire them, and admiration has psychological motivating force that cold judgments about goodness lack. Hume's central concern with motivation is inherited by this view.

14.8.2 Explains Why Epistemologists Use the "Method of Cases"

If, as the reliabilist insists, reliably producing true beliefs is what makes a trait a virtue (or any first-order criterion, responsibilist, eudaimonist, …), why do we consult our intuitions about cases to determine if they are really virtues? This is a question that I find students often ask in an introductory epistemology class, and explaining the methodology of counterexamples to them elicits surprise.

Authors give arguments about the nature of epistemic virtues (or the nature of justification, or knowledge) based on ideas of what has fundamental epistemic value. We can have further debates about the nature and ranking of those values. Yet our epistemic judgments about specific cases seem to matter too. Epistemic sense theory can explain this. Even though reliability (or some other epistemic standard) is correlated with approbation, what makes a trait a virtue is our approbation itself.

14.8.3 Explains Apparent Tensions in Our Judgments

What should we say of character traits that we ordinarily classify as virtues when we find them in a person who is otherwise vicious? Two examples that Linda Zagzebski works through are those of a courageous Nazi and of a compassionate but biased judge. In both cases, we have a traditional virtue (courage, compassion), but the possession of that trait makes the person's actions overall worse. These two examples were chosen because they extend the critique from the moral to the epistemic cases. The courageous Nazi is more dedicated to his vile plans and is more likely to bring about terrible consequences because he is not willing to give up. The compassionate judge applies his compassion in a biased way, leading him to more incorrect verdicts than he would have reached had he not been compassionate.

These cases are a problem for the virtue theorist, who holds that virtues always make their possessors better. This is clearly a view held by the reliabilist virtue theorist. Reliably bringing about good outcomes or true beliefs is what makes a trait a virtue for the reliabilist. By this standard,

courage in the Nazi is not a moral virtue, and compassion in the judge is not an epistemic virtue – both traits bring about worse outcomes. This is a puzzle because these traits seem like virtues generally; they are traits that we want people to develop. The reliabilist has to say that we only want certain people to develop these traits, undermining the idea of virtues in general.

The responsibilist may also avoid Zagzebski's puzzle by saying that these traits are not virtues, particularly if they have a conception of the virtues on which they all require phronesis. This claim of unity of the virtues is a strong one; one cannot have virtue without phronesis, and one cannot have phronesis without all the virtues. This is an Aristotelian answer to the puzzle, but it seems to undermine our ability to identify virtues. Someone may act just as a virtuous person would, but lacking one virtue, even one they are not called on to use, their character trait is not a virtue.

The problem with both the reliabilist and responsibilist answers to these puzzling cases is the assumption that there is a sort of additive nature of virtues. Virtues always make their possessors better. Zagzebski argues against this claim, but her doing so requires quite a bit of finesse, as she holds a responsibilist view with reliabilist elements. She focuses on moral development and notes that the courageous Nazi is closer to his ideal self insofar as he would not need to develop courage to approach that ideal. But this view depends on a particular picture of moral development.

The moral or epistemic sense view, on the other hand, has a straightforward answer to these puzzles because it does not assume any additive nature to the virtues. We can admire the courage of the Nazi, while at the same time detesting his other character traits/intentions. There is simply no tension between these two claims because the moral and epistemic sense view is not committed to any additivity or reciprocity of the virtues. The sense view allows flexibility in recognizing virtues in context; some character traits that are otherwise admirable can make a person worse in particular configurations. While this view is flexible, it isn't without standards. We can always ask, not just about a particular trait, but about a person as a whole – is this person admirable? If they are not, then we do not have a reason or motivation to develop all their traits for ourselves or to value that constellation of traits in others.

14.8.4 Explains Patterns of Failures of Judgment

The independent nature of our virtue judgments on the epistemic sense view also helps to explain certain persistent patterns of failure of our epistemic evaluations. Unfortunately, we are susceptible to being taken in by con men. It would be good to have a theory that tells us why we shouldn't be, but also one that explains why con men can seem so persuasive. In

addition to the fact that they are often offering us a surprisingly good deal, thereby appealing to our self-interest, we can also note that they have (at least the appearance of) a character trait that we admire – confidence. In a population that regulates their levels of confidence according to their levels of evidence, confidence can be a good indicator of competence. And, since competence is often harder to see, they/we might admire confidence in itself. The epistemic sense view can countenance this and even recognize confidence as an epistemic virtue. But, at the same time, the epistemic sense view will ask us to note the evaluation we would give to the confidence of the man as a whole; he is confident but also not competent and determined to swindle others. This constellation does not evoke our approbation, and the con man is not an (epistemically) virtuous character.

A similar diagnosis can help us see the dangers of conspiracy theories and conspiracy theorists. In some ways, they look like good epistemic agents. They are dogged in their search for information and present theories for which they can give many reasons. Further, unlike the con men, they (often) believe their own theories. So, they are not aiming to swindle or deceive. How then can we criticize the epistemic character traits of the conspiracy theorist? By noting the way that the parts of their reasoning work together. Keith Harris' recent critique of conspiracy theories takes this approach.[11] He notes that conspiracy theorists are skeptical of the official story (a plausible criterion for being a conspiracy theorist) while at the same time being credulous about alternative explanations. We might admire skepticism in some circumstances, but together with credulity, it generates an epistemic character trait that does not evoke approbation.[12]

Notes

1 Battaly (2018).
2 Battaly (2015).
3 O'Brien (2012) and Shafer (2014).
4 Glathe (1950).
5 Schafer (2014).
6 Note that this is close to Zagzebski's argument that creativity is a virtue (1996).
7 But even reliabilism has to recognize the twin goals of forming true beliefs and avoiding falsehoods. So, there may already be tension in that view.
8 Zagzebski (2012).
9 Mitova (2011).
10 E.g., Whitcomb et al. (2015).
11 Harris (2018).
12 Thanks to the helpful feedback from commentators and participants at the Epistemic Virtue Workshop at the African Center for Epistemology and the Philosophy of Science.

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15 Humean Vice Epistemology
The Case of Prejudice

Mark Collier

15.1 Part One: Hume's Anatomy of Prejudice

In Section T 1.3.13 of the *Treatise*, "Of unphilosophical probability", Hume attempts to understand why prejudices are so widespread and difficult to eradicate. Prejudices are unreasonable, according to Hume, and contrary to evidence. What is it about human nature that makes us vulnerable to making these unwarranted generalizations? And what can we do to correct this natural propensity?

According to Hume, a prejudice is, by definition, a pejorative term; it is a "rashly" formed general rule that connects social groups with negative traits (T 1.3.13.7; SBN 146). These generalizations are rashly formed, or lacking in careful consideration, in the sense that they are based on insufficient observations. Suppose that we observe a *small sample* of A's who are B's. The problem is that we do not feel any hesitation when expecting the next A to be B. Rather, we take this limited evidence as conclusive *proof* that all A's are B's and presume that social groups are completely homogeneous, such that there cannot possibly be a member of the A-group who lacks the property B. Prejudices take the logical form, therefore, of universal generalizations. Whereas laws of nature are unrestricted *true* generalizations, according to Hume, prejudices are unrestricted *false* generalizations.

Prejudices are also epistemically pernicious, according to Hume, insofar as they cause us to ignore counter-evidence at our disposal. Consider Hume's description of the types of ethnic prejudices that were prevalent in his lifetime.

> An Irishman cannot have wit, and a Frenchman cannot have solidity; for which reason, tho' the conversation of the former in any instance be visibly very agreeable, and of the latter very judicious, we have entertain'd such a prejudice against them, that they must be dunces or fops in spite of sense and reason.
>
> (T 1.3.13.7; SBN 146–7)

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Even when the supposed universal generalization has been falsified, in other words, and we directly perceive a member of a social group who fails to exemplify the negative trait (A & ~B), our prejudices render us dogmatic and prevent us from revising our preconceptions.

Hume is clearly reporting the existence of these attitudes rather than endorsing them. After all, Hume goes out of his way to criticize these prejudices as "errors" (T 1.3.13.7; SBN 147) and explicitly states that philosophers such as himself condemn any rashly formed general rules (T 1.3.13.12; SBN 150). Indeed, Hume categorizes prejudices from the outset of this section of the *Treatise* as a species of *unphilosophical probabilities* that are not considered to be "reasonable foundations of belief and opinion" (T 1.3.13.1; SBN 143).

Hume argues that human beings are nevertheless susceptible to making this type of error. The reason for this is that our everyday social judgments are based on implicit associations rather than careful reasoning. Prejudices are formed when associative links are created in our imaginations between social groups and negative attributes. These associative connections also produce a type of *inertia* that maintains prejudices in the face of contrary evidence. Suppose that we encounter a novel member of group A who resembles previous instances in many respects but is dissimilar in terms of the lack of property B. We automatically assimilate this partially resembling instance to the general ideas stored in memory, according to Hume, and thus retain our prejudice in spite of the fact that this new member of the group logically refutes our universal generalization. We perceive this person *as if* they exhibited the negative trait, in other words, even if they do not really do so. Thus, the associative principles of the imagination are causally responsible for the fact that we succumb to hasty universal generalizations and persist in believing these prejudices even when they are "contrary to present observation and experience" (T 1.3.13.8, SBN 147; cf. T 1.3.13.12, SBN 148).

The fact that prejudices depend on associative principles entails that these propensities will be difficult to control or eradicate. The inference from *group membership* ("x is A") to *negative traits* ("x is B"), as Hume puts it, involves a "natural transition, which precedes reflection, and which cannot be prevented by it" (T 1.3.13.8; SBN 147). Just as we immediately expect that a stationary billiard ball will launch on impact, on this account, so too we (or at least those who have acquired the relevant prejudice) will automatically infer that the next Irishman we encounter will lack intelligence. And we do so for the exact same reason: our social judgments are governed by the very same principles of custom and habit "on which all judgments concerning causes and effects depend" (ibid.).

We appear powerless, on this account, to avoid making such errors. But this is not the lesson that Hume draws. He does maintain that prejudices

are *sticky* in the sense that they operate automatically and unconsciously and thus will persist in the face of contrary evidence. But Hume proceeds to argue that human beings have the intellectual capacity to "correct" these associative propensities by carefully reflecting on the total evidence at our disposal (T 1.3.13.9; SBN 148). Hume's official position is that our everyday or naive social judgments are based on principles of custom and habit; but he maintains that sophisticated judges rely on a different set of general rules, which he calls "rules for judging causes and effects", in order to *screen off* illusory correlations. These rules enable judicious reasoners to discover the deeper regularities in our social world: when we observe a member of group A who lacks a negative trait B, for example, they direct us to conclude that this property is an accidental factor rather than a genuine or essential feature of this population. When we come into contact, for example, with Irishmen who are highly intelligent – such as Bishop Berkeley or Frances Hutcheson – we discover that there is no necessary connection between *being Irish* and being a *dunce*.

Hume is much less sanguine, however, about whether these reflective corrections will stop us from continuing to associate these groups and traits. Employing the rules for judging causes and effects does not eliminate these stubborn implicit biases, in other words, but rather leaves behind a *divided mind* where we simultaneously *imagine* that x is B while *judging* that x is ~B (T 1.3.13.9; SBN 148).

Hume illustrates this predicament with the well-known example of a man suspended from a high tower in an iron cage. This person "cannot bear trembling", according to Hume, even though he judges that he is really safe and secure, since the solid iron bars beneath his feet will prevent his fall (T 1.3.13.10; SBN 148). Nevertheless, the perception of the ground below will trigger associated ideas of falling and death, and these ideas will in turn produce feelings of terror.

The man in the iron cage, like the person who corrects their prejudices, exhibits an opposition between imagination and judgment. Just as a scientist might conclude that superstitions are unjustified, yet feel a nagging sense of unease when walking under ladders, or stepping on sidewalk cracks, so too a judicious reasoner might decide that there is no predictive relationship between social groups and negative traits, yet continue to associate these properties at the level of custom and habit, and thus feel a "contrariety of sentiments" toward one and the same person (T 1.3.13.9; SBN 148).

One might object that it is Hume's position that is contradictory: how can he maintain that we are able to *correct* our prejudices while saying at the same time that they are *incorrigible*? But this worry dissolves when we distinguish implicit biases and explicit judgments. Hume's official position is that we cannot prevent these stubborn associations from occurring at

the level of custom and habit. But we are capable of reflectively acknowledging the pernicious influence that these biases have on our everyday social attributions. Even if judicious spectators cannot extirpate these illusory correlations from their minds, therefore, they can selectively ignore these spurious factors when making their considered social judgments.

15.2 Part Two: Hume's Broad Delineation of Intellectual Vice and Doxastic Responsibility

What factors determine whether a particular agent will regulate their implicit biases? Hume maintains that individual differences in terms of *intellectual character* account for whether one checks their prejudices and other unphilosophical probabilities.

> Sometimes the one, sometimes the other prevails, according to the disposition and character of the person. The vulgar are commonly guided by the first, and wise men by the second.
>
> (T 1.3.13.12, SBN 149)

A *foolish* person allows themselves to be guided by their propensities to make rash generalizations and ignore contrary evidence, in other words, whereas a *wise* person refuses to reflectively endorse these associative tendencies and embraces the corrective rules for judging causes and effects.

Whereas *wisdom* is an intellectual virtue, on Hume's account, *foolishness* is an intellectual vice. Hume maintains that *foolishness*, or lack of understanding, reduces our social esteem toward others.

> Who did say, except by way of irony, that such a one was a man of great virtue, but an egregious blockhead?
>
> (EMP A4.2)

Indeed, Hume regards *foolishness* as one of the most shameful traits. This personal quality is disposed to produce such intense feelings of "disgust" in spectators that it is capable of dissolving the bonds of friendship, and only the love of parents for their children can survive this type of condemnation (EPM 6.16; SBN 240).

Hume delineates a number of intellectual vices in his epistemological writings. Consider *credulity*, for example, which is defined as "too easy faith in the testimony of others"; this vice manifests itself in a particular propensity, according to Hume, to "believe what is reported, even concerning apparitions, enchantments, and prodigies, however contrary to daily experience and observation" (T 1.3.9.12; SBN 112–3). Beliefs about prodigies or apparitions are unjustified because they violate evidentialist

norms: we extend our assent "beyond what experience will justify" (T 1.3.9.12; SBN 113). And if we repeatedly make this type of mistake, this reveals something about our intellectual character, and we can be said to be credulous, or gullible when it comes to testimony. Hume includes intellectual *arrogance* as one of the "vices and follies" of our minds (EHU 5.1; SBN 40–1); he also describes *dogmatism* and intellectual *stubbornness* as "infirmities" of the mind that philosophers attempt to combat (EHU 12.24; SBN 161–2; cf. T 1.4.7.15; SBN 273–4).

Each of these character traits qualifies as intellectual vices, on Hume's account, because they are apt to produce a range of condemnatory emotions in spectators. Once we apprehend that someone is *credulous* or *foolish*, for example, these "faults" are "instantly blamed" and produce a "sentiment of pain and disapprobation" (EPM 6.1; SBN 233). We do not direct our disapproval toward mental states such as false beliefs or hasty inferences; rather, we target the stable character traits that underlie this type of intellectual and prudential conduct. And we ultimately blame these character traits, and regard them as blameworthy faults, because of their harmful consequences. The problem with *obstinacy* and *credulity*, for example, is that these traits incapacitate us for action (EPM 6.1; SBN 233). Extreme *foolishness* is considered a serious flaw, moreover, because it renders one a "*useless* burden upon the earth" (EPM 6.16; SBN 240).

Hume recognizes that most philosophers in the early modern period would not go along with the notion that intellectual vices are blameworthy. Character traits such as *foolishness* and *credulity* and *arrogance*, on these accounts, should more properly be labeled cognitive "defects" rather than vices (EPM A4.1; SBN 312). But Hume maintains that there are no legitimate reasons to exclude these qualities from the catalog of vice. One possible reason for treating these qualities as mere defects, for example, is that they are involuntary and are not based on personal choice (EPM A 4.2; SBN 313). Nobody ever decides, after all, to become foolish or credulous.

But Hume argues that control over the acquisition of our character traits is not ordinarily regarded as a necessary condition of blaming agents. A quick survey of everyday intuitions of praise and blame across the globe, according to Hume, reveals that "almost all languages" treat personal qualities as vices even if they are not up to us (EPM A4.2, SBN 313; cf. T 3.3.4.4; SBN 609). These common intuitions are shared by ancient philosophers, moreover, who typically viewed "endowments" and "defects" of the mind as intellectual virtues and vices (EPM A4.11; SBN 318). Indeed, ancient philosophers condemned vices such as *folly* as "contemptible and odious", even though this quality was believed to be "independent of the will" (EPM A4.20. SBN 321–2; *cf.* T 3.3.4.3, SBN 608).

Another possible reason for narrowly drawing the boundaries of vice is that only moral qualities such as *justice* and *malevolence* are genuinely deserving of praise and blame. But Hume maintains that this amounts to a distinction without a difference.

> Should we lay hold of the distinction between intellectual and moral endowments, and affirm the last alone to be real and genuine virtues, because they alone lead to action, we should find, that many of those qualities, usually called intellectual virtues… had also a considerable influence on conduct.
>
> (EPM A4.2; SBN 313)

There is no categorical basis, from a consequentialist perspective, for excluding intellectual traits from the domain of vices. *Credulity* might not be as harmful as *cruelty*. But this is a matter of degree rather than kind and only indicates that our sentiments of disapprobation lie on a continuum (EPM A4.2; SBN 314).

The question of whether to include intellectual character within the boundaries of vice, then, amounts to a *verbal dispute* which should be of little interest to philosophers (EPM A 4.1; SBN 313). Our feelings of disapprobation toward intellectual and moral vices are similar in nature. And we behave in analogous ways toward those who display these qualities; even if we do not formally punish someone for their *foolishness*, we do impose informal social sanctions and reduce our feelings of esteem, goodwill, and friendship (EPM A 4.5-5; SBN 316). The claim that intellectual vices should be labeled cognitive defects, then, is a merely grammatical rather than a substantive point (EPM A 4.1; SBN 313).

15.3 Part Three: Hume and Contemporary Vice Epistemology

Contemporary "vice epistemologists", such as Quassim Cassam, understand intellectual vices in consequentialist terms. Character traits such as *gullibility* and *foolishness* and *prejudice* are epistemic vices, according to Cassam, because they obstruct effective inquiry (Cassam 2019, 5). Cassam would object to Hume's broad account of doxastic blameworthiness, however, on the grounds that some type of control over the acquisition and retention of character traits is necessary to hold agents responsible. In contexts where these epistemic vices are not ultimately up to us, according to contemporary vice epistemologists, we should retract our attributions of blame and responsibility.

Consider Heather Battaly's example of a young Pakistani man who has the bad luck of being indoctrinated by the Taliban (Battaly 2016, 100).

We would not say that this person is blameworthy for the *dogmatism* that results, since this character trait was not voluntarily acquired; the young man would presumably also not have any control over the fact that he remains close-minded, since his dogmatism would block him from even recognizing this characteristic as a vice in need of correction. In cases such as these, according to Cassam, where one lacks both acquisition control and revision control, it is unreasonable to attribute responsibility or blame (Cassam 2019, 20–1).

Cassam maintains that we are nevertheless justified in *criticizing* the Taliban recruit for his epistemic vice. Even if the young man lacked control over originally becoming or continually being dogmatic, this character trait is nevertheless properly considered to be a personal failing that casts "a negative shadow over him" as a thinker (ibid., 138). Moreover, we would regard someone with this type of character trait as *reprehensible* (ibid., 21–2). Thus, the necessary conditions of *blame* are stricter, on Cassam's account, than those of *criticism*.

Hume would regard Cassam's delineation between blame and criticism, however, as a grammatical rather than a substantive distinction. To say that someone's intellectual faults are reprehensible and open to criticism, and to say that they reflect badly on someone as a thinker, is tantamount to saying that they are fitting targets of sentiments of disapprobation. Hume would agree with Cassam that we would not regard the Taliban recruit as blameworthy and responsible in the strong sense of these terms, where it implies that he is *accountable* for his dogmatism and exerts control over their acquisition or retention; after all, Hume's position appears to be that none of us are *ever* in control over our characters. But Hume would assert that we are nevertheless blameworthy in the weaker sense that blame is *attributable* to us (Vitz 2009, 218).

It is simply not the case, according to Hume, that we ordinarily withdraw our disapprobation when we come to understand that agents were not in control of their character. Just as our feelings of disgust and hatred would not dissipate if we learned that Jeffrey Dahmer was not in control of his *cruelty*, so too we do not ordinarily care about whether someone like Donald Rumsfeld was ultimately responsible for his intellectual *arrogance* or *imperviousness to evidence*. And if that is the case, then the only genuine disagreement between Hume and Cassam concerns what label or appellation best describes our social disapprobation. And it is a purely verbal dispute whether to call them "blameworthy" or "reprehensible", if the way we behave toward such agents, and the way we feel about them, are approximately the same.

A similar point can be made about Cassam's claim that it would be excessively moralistic to describe intellectual vices as *morally* blameworthy.

> On the face of it… there is a world of difference between genuine moral failings such as cruelty and mundane intellectual failings such as gullibility and wishful thinking. It would be excessively moralistic to regard all such failings as moral.
>
> (Cassam 2019, 18)

Some intellectual vices, according to Cassam, are moral vices; but it would be wrong to regard every epistemic vice this way, since some of them are harmless-to-others and thus are only *epistemically* blameworthy because they obstruct inquiry.

But the distinction between epistemic and moral blame, at least for consequentialists, isn't as sharp as Cassam maintains. As we saw in part two of this paper, Hume denies that one can make a categorical distinction between intellectual and moral vices, on the grounds that intellectual vices have a "considerable influence" on actions. This reminds one of Clifford's critique of James: namely, that our beliefs cannot be considered a personal matter since they dispose us to act in ways that impact the welfare of others. And it should be pointed out that *foolishness* and *gullibility* and other epistemic vices are capable of causing enormous harm to society. And this would not of course be lost on Cassam, who wrote his book on epistemic vices as a warning of how dangerous such traits are to undermining democracies.

There is one point on which Cassam's vice epistemology, it should be pointed out, has a clear advantage over Hume's. Hume appears to deny that agents have any revisionary control over their character traits. He writes at one point, for example, that it is "almost impossible for the mind to change its character in any considerable article" (T 1.3.3.4; SBN 608). Contemporary vice epistemologists like Cassam are much optimistic, in any case, that intellectual character traits are *malleable* (Cassam 2019, 127). We ordinarily have some degree of *managerial control*, as Cassam puts it, over our character vices: someone who is intellectually *arrogant* can voluntarily expose themselves to superior intellects, for example, and those who are *dogmatic* can force themselves to engage with heterodox views (Cassam 2019, 129).

Hume's theory of human nature acknowledges, it should be pointed out, that we have motivation to change our intellectual characters. If we want to gain social esteem and approbation from others, and ultimately from ourselves when we reflect on our intellectual conduct, we need to inculcate the appropriate set of intellectual virtues that are valued in our community. Moreover, Hume is more sanguine elsewhere in the *Treatise* about the possibility of human beings changing their character traits. In Hume's discussion of justice as an artificial virtue, for example, he maintains that the threats of external sanctions from governmental institutions can motivate

us to curb our *impulsiveness* and develop *self-control*. So it would be open for him to assert that it would also be prudentially rational for us to submit ourselves to educational systems that inculcate critical thinking skills and offer ameliorative remedies that can help to correct the epistemic vices we absorb during our youth. Indeed, this is precisely the point, according to Hume, of teaching skepticism in the schools: it serves as an antidote to the stubborn *dogmatism* and superstitious *credulity* that are natural flaws of the human mind (EHU 12.24; SBN 161–2).

15.4 Part Four: Hume's Racial Prejudices

Hume maintains that we are blameworthy for intellectual character traits even if we lack control over them. We are culpable for the vice of *prejudice*, then, even if we learned these prejudices at our parent's knees and are unable to even recognize them as prejudices. The first problem with prejudices, according to Hume, is that one is *too quick* to believe them: one hastily infers from a small sample of A's that are B's to the conclusion that every member of social group A has the property B. The second problem with prejudices, according to Hume, is that one is *too slow* to correct them. When we continue to assent to prejudices in the face of counterexamples, on his view, we are intellectually *undiscerning* and unable to distinguish accidental and genuine regularities. But it does not matter that our hasty inferences can be traced back to automatic propensities of the imagination or that our failure to employ rules for judging causes and effects flows from a character trait of *foolishness* that we never chose and could not prevent. These are nevertheless personal failures that render us proper targets of blame and social criticism.

What would Hume's vice epistemology say, then, about his own racial prejudices about the intellectual abilities of Blacks? In a notorious footnote to the essay "On National Differences", Hume asserts that one cannot find a single Black person with a capacity for eminence in either speculation or action. And to say that no Blacks are capable of making significant intellectual contributions is logically equivalent, of course, to the universal generalization that all Blacks are incapable of this type of intellectual eminence. It seems that Hume has made exactly the same type of rash generalization that he condemns in his discussion of prejudice in T 1.3.13. Moreover, it appears that Hume also failed to correct this mistake when confronted with contrary evidence. Thus, he is morally blameworthy for this intellectual vice, according to his own normative standards, and would not get off the hook even if these prejudices were beyond his control.

Contemporary philosophers who work on the epistemology of prejudice argue that Hume would not be culpable for his rash generalizations about Blacks, so long as these beliefs were based on innocent mistakes

and skewed samples. Consider Nomy Arpaly's fictional example of Solomon, a boy raised in a "small, isolated farming community", who never encountered a woman who displays a talent for abstract thought; everyone in Solomon's local community, moreover, including the women themselves, believe that women are "not half as competent when it comes to abstract thinking" (Arpaly 2003, 103). Arpaly maintains that Solomon in these circumstances would not be considered epistemically culpable. We would ordinarily regard Solomon as ignorant because he holds false beliefs about the intellectual capacities of women. But this is not sufficient to make him blameworthy because there is no indication that his false beliefs were based on bad intentions; it would take the exceptional genius of a John Stuart Mill, moreover, for someone in Solomon's situation to recognize that his beliefs are false without any contrary evidence (ibid., 104).

Our attitude toward Solomon would change dramatically, according to Arpaly, if we imagine him receiving a scholarship to a university where he encounters a number of brilliant female students and professors. If Solomon were to revise his belief about the intellectual capacities of women in the light of this new evidence, it would confirm that his earlier stereotypes are excusable as blameless ignorance. But if Solomon were to persist in ascribing to the intellectual inferiority of women, we would now regard him as culpably irrational (ibid.). The fact that he maintains his universal generalizations in the face of striking counterexamples would reveal that his commitments are not in fact based on evidence or reasons; rather, they reflect a motivated irrationality that is responsive to a deep-seated animosity toward women or a psychological need to protect his own ego.

What would Arpaly conclude, then, about Hume's footnote? Arpaly might be willing to excuse Hume's universal generalization on the grounds that his false belief reflects a widely held conviction of the time, whereby skin complexion was mistakenly thought to fix one's capacity for intellectual eminence. But Arpaly would not exculpate Hume from blame once it is revealed that Hume perseveres in endorsing this belief in the face of contrary evidence. Hume was clearly aware of the writings of the Jamaican scholar and poet Francis Williams, who was acclaimed by many at the time for his Latin verse (Popkin 1992, 71). Hume quickly dismisses these compositions as derivative and devoid of creativity, however, comparing Williams to a parrot that is praised for uttering a few simple words in English (Miller 1987, 208n). Hume reacts to this contrary evidence, then, in precisely the way that he condemns as unreasonable in the *Treatise*. Like Solomon at the university, he stubbornly refuses to change his mind. One is reminded of Thomas Jefferson's dismissive response to the writings of the great American poet Phillis Wheatley. Jefferson apparently shares

Hume's prejudice against the intellectual capacities of Blacks, and as a result, he maintains that her literary work is derivative and imitative rather than original (Gates 2009, 49).

Endre Begby objects to Arpaly's position on the grounds that Solomon cannot be reasonably accused of being epistemically irrational even after he has encountered a number of intelligent women. The problem with Arpaly's argument, according to Begby, is that it turns on a serious misconception about the "logical structure of prejudices" (Begby 2013, 90). The common prejudices that one encounters in the social world do not in fact take the form of universally quantified inductive generalizations; rather, they usually involve prototypical judgments about the negative attributes of social groups. Prejudices most frequently take the form of *generic statements* such as "used car salesmen are liars", in other words, where it is understood that there are rare exceptions to this general rule (Begby 2013, 91). So Solomon's prejudice should not be unpacked as the statement that "*all* women are half as intellectually competent as men"; rather, it should be understood as the claim "the *typical woman* is half as intellectually competent as the *average* man". The logical form of this prejudice allows for degrees of intelligence among both the male and female populations; it also makes room for exceptional cases, on the tails of these normal distributions, where some women will be more intelligent than the least intelligent men.

Begby argues that one would expect to find these exceptional women, moreover, studying and teaching at universities. It would not be epistemically irrational for Solomon to maintain his prejudicial beliefs, then, even while incorporating this new sample of data into his total body of evidence (Begby 2013, 93–4). Begby might be willing to excuse Hume from blame, therefore, in light of the minor revisions that Hume made to a second version of his footnote published in 1777. Hume slightly modifies the footnote to say that Blacks *scarcely ever*, rather than *never*, display intellectual eminence in the arts and sciences. This amendment suggests that Hume took into consideration the contrary evidence about the intellectual achievements of writers such as Wheatley, and perhaps, a notable philosopher such as Anton Wilhelm Amo. Hume's revised position is that Blacks are capable of intellectual eminence, then, but that these are exceptions rather than the rule. And stating his racial prejudices in terms of the logic of generics would entail, as Begby points out in the case of Solomon, that it is not epistemically irrational for him to remain steadfast and persevere with his racial prejudices even in the face of counterexamples. Hume would not be denying that it was possible for Blacks to achieve intellectual eminence; he would only be asserting that these cases are extremely rare, and that one would likely find them in exceptional circumstances, such

as that of Amo, who was trained from a young age to be a philosopher (Popkin 1992, 70).

There are independent reasons for thinking, however, that Hume's racial generalizations are epistemically irrational, even when weakened and hedged as they are in the 1777 revised edition of the footnote. On what evidentiary basis, after all, did Hume make this assertion? Hume bases his generalizations on purported facts about the ingenuity among African slaves. But as Hume's contemporary, James Beattie, points out, it is unreasonable to draw any conclusions about the intellectual capacities of Blacks from achievements of slaves, who were denied any formal education and were subjected to brutal lives of servility. To infer that Blacks are naturally inferior because they did not rise to intellectual prominence in these conditions, according to Beattie, is like concluding that a white European is "an inferior species, because he has not raised himself to the condition of royalty" (Harris 2004, 136).

Hume had reason to distrust his racial generalizations, therefore, given their inadequate empirical support. Moreover, Hume's own psychological theories, according to which human beings are naturally prone to making hasty generalizations about social groups, provide higher-order evidence that should have led him to suspend judgment about the intellectual capacities of Blacks, at least until he was able to gather sufficient anthropological evidence that would enable him to adequately screen off accidental factors. Indeed, this is especially true given his own theoretical approach to national differences, which privileges socio-cultural causes, such as access to education, over physical explanations (Valls 2005, 128). Hume does not adequately reflect on his rash generalizations, therefore, and is blameworthy for making social judgments without proper regard to the total evidence at his disposal.

Does the fact that Hume is a historical figure writing in the middle of the 18th century make a difference in terms of exculpating him from blame for his failure to properly correct his racial prejudices? Miranda Fricker's account of doxastic responsibility potentially absolves Hume from epistemic or moral blame on the grounds that he lived at a time when ideas of racial equality were only slowly beginning to emerge. Consider Fricker's evaluation of the character Herbert Greenleaf, for example, from the screenplay for the film *The Talented Mr. Ripley*. Greenleaf ignores the testimony of his son Dickie's fiancée, Marge Sherwood, about the role that Tom Ripley played in Dickie's death. Greenleaf commits testimonial injustice against Marge, according to Fricker, because he fails to assign her the credibility she deserves. He dismisses her testimony simply because she is a woman and is thus too emotional and hysterical to think straight about such serious matters (Fricker 2007, 168).

Fricker argues that Greenleaf is not culpable for his gender prejudices, since his attitudes toward women such as Marge are saturated by the sexism of the day (ibid., 89–90). Fricker maintains that Greenleaf is nonculpably at fault, moreover, for his failure to reflectively correct and neutralize the impact of these negative stereotypes. The reason is that the screenplay takes place in the "historical context" of the 1950s, where the concepts required for Greenleaf to engage in reflective critical awareness about his gender prejudice were not available to him (ibid., 89, *cf*. 101). Greenleaf is not blameworthy for his biases, then, because one would not reasonably expect someone in his socio-historical context to do better; Greenleaf was a victim of "circumstantial epistemic bad luck", as Fricker puts it, that tragically prevented him from discovering the truth about his son's murder (ibid., 33).

Did Hume also succumb to bad epistemic and moral luck? Was he simply unfortunate to have been raised in an era where his preconceptions would be saturated by racial prejudices, and where the concepts of racial equality necessary for critical self-reflection would not be fully articulated until centuries later? It is difficult to understand how Fricker could absolve Greenleaf for failing to correct his gender prejudices in the 1950s but not exonerate Hume for unchecked racial prejudices in the 18th century. It seems that she would have to hold, for considerations of parity, that Hume is not blameworthy for his intellectual failures.

It should be noted that Fricker does not, however, let Greenleaf completely off the hook for his gender biases. There is another sense in which we can still reasonably criticize characters such as Greenleaf, according to Fricker, while acknowledging that their attitudes were commonplace in their historical contexts. Even if sentiments of anger and indignation are off the table, as Fricker puts it, there are other types of moral resentment that "remain in play" (ibid., 103). We are apt to feel a sense of *disappointment* at the fact that Greenleaf failed to exceed the routine expectations of agents in his era and did not manage to amplify the limited concepts at his disposal to make an imaginative leap in our thinking about gender equality (Fricker 2007, 104). Even though we would not ordinarily *blame* someone for failing to extend the moral consciousness of their age, we would nevertheless feel a sense of sadness in response to their failure to rise above the prejudices of their day.

This sense of disappointment might seem particularly apt when directed at Hume, since he was such an exceptional thinker in nearly every other domain of thought and managed to question, revise, and extend so many philosophical concepts. Someone able to raise skeptical doubts about traditional concepts of causation, induction, and the external world should have been able to distrust his own assumptions

about the necessary connection between complexion and intelligence. One of the leading thinkers of the age of enlightenment could have done better, it seems, and been able to formulate new concepts that would have allowed him to reflectively evaluate his own racial biases. It is natural to feel that Hume could and should have been exceptional and risen above the common prejudices of his day.

The criterion for whether we should condemn someone as prejudiced, according to Hume, is whether they fail to correct their negative generalizations about social groups when presented with countervailing evidence. Thus, *Hume fails to pass his own test*. However, this does not amount to saying, as Popkin does, that Hume is a "lousy empirical scientist" (Popkin 1992, 72). Hume is the first philosopher to place systematic biases and errors of the mind at the center of his theory of human nature. And Hume offers an innovative account of the role that implicit biases play in explaining why we often fail to believe what we should. The problem with Hume is that he is an astute observer when it comes to the intellectual vices of others but has a blind spot when it comes to detecting his own faults. Hume acknowledges at one point that human nature is "very subject" to prejudices and concedes that this is true of his own nation, "as much as any other" (T 1.3.13.7; SBN 147). He should have added: and this is true of me as well. Unfortunately, this lack of self-knowledge stains what was otherwise an exemplary virtuous character.

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Part IX

The Epistemology of Testimony

16 Hume and the Epistemology of Testimony

Dan O'Brien

There are three broad approaches to testimony in contemporary analytic epistemology: reductionism, anti-reductionism and trust-based or interpersonal accounts. Hume is taken by most to be a reductionist, but I argue that he is an anti-reductionist and that his account of testimony also respects the distinction between interpersonal trust and reliance that is central to trust-based accounts (O'Brien 2022).[1]

Hume's essay on miracles focuses on written and spoken testimony concerning alleged miraculous occurrences and he argues that we should not believe such reports and that they do not provide evidence for the existence of God. In that essay, though, Hume claims that 'there is no species of reasoning more common, more useful, and even necessary to human life, than that which is derived from the testimony of men and the reports of eye-witnesses and spectators' (EHU 10). Trust in testimony is undoubtedly widespread and useful, but Tony Coady (1992) also extracts a 'Humean' account of testimonial justification from the discussion of miracles that is applicable to testimony in general. There are occasions when we are right to trust testimony and those where our trust is misplaced, as is the case with miracle-reports. Two kinds of evidence should be weighed against each other in order to determine whether we should believe a particular speaker or text. We must weigh the likelihood of the reported event occurring against the chance that the testifier is mistaken in some way or lying. That Caesar was assassinated in the Senate House is not that unlikely an event given the political machinations of Ancient Rome, whereas it is very unlikely that such an event would be misreported by the many eye-witnesses and subsequent historians. Hume is seen as an evidentialist—our trust in others assessed according to empirical, inductive evidence concerning the likely truth of what they say: '[t]he reason, why we place any credit in witnesses and historians, is not derived from any *connexion*, which we perceive *a priori*, between testimony and reality, but because we are accustomed to find a conformity between them'

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(EHU 10.8). This is a reductionist interpretation since the justification possessed by testimonially acquired beliefs is explained in terms of perception, memory and inductive inference. I am justified in believing what someone says because I have perceptual evidence that they regularly tell the truth, I remember their reliable record and I can inductively infer that they are likely to continue to be reliable. Our 'assurance' that someone speaks the truth 'is derived from no other principle than our observation of the veracity of human testimony, and of the usual conformity of facts to the reports of witnesses' (EHU 10.5).

In letters to Hugh Blair, David Dalrymple and Edward Gibbon,[2] Hume waded into the controversy concerning the authorship of the Ossian poems. Some took these to be transcriptions of ancient Gaelic texts, ostensibly composed by the blind bard Ossian around the third century CE. Others, however, argued they were fabrications by the publisher James McPherson. Hume's assessment of the evidence was based on empirical considerations concerning the likelihood of the texts being genuine, that is, composed by Ossian and concerning real historical events. Several features of the text were suspicious to Hume. These included the length of the texts and the unlikelihood that such long poems could be preserved by oral tradition; the 'correctness, and regularity, and uniformity of the style' (LDH 1.399); the generosity and chivalrousness of the ancient people described; the lack of monsters and religion in such old texts; and the fact that there were no fragments in common with those collected by earlier compilers of ancient Gaelic works. Hume therefore took the poems to be forgeries—and it turned out he was right.[3]

The same evidentialist approach is taken to miracle-testimony. Miracles are events that are contrary to the laws of nature, and since the laws of nature describe universal regularities in our experience, there is 'uniform experience against every miraculous event' (EHU 10.12). Thus, 'the proof against a miracle, from the very nature of the fact, is as entire as any argument from experience can possibly be imagined' (EHU 10.12). We must therefore have very persuasive testimony to counteract such evidence: evidence that testifiers have always been reliable, that they have never been dishonest and that their mental health and perceptual faculties are normal. In Part II of the miracles essay, Hume details various psychological and anthropological reasons why such evidence is unlikely to be found in the case of testimony concerning religious miracles.

This reductionist interpretation of Hume is standard in the literature. Jennifer Lackey takes Hume to be 'the most well-known proponent of this view' (2008, 142); Robert Fogelin refers to the 'Humean or inductive approach' (2003, 89) and Mark Webb to 'Humean reductionism' (1993, 263). Elizabeth Fricker (1994), however, distinguishes between global and local reductionism and there are corresponding variants of reductionist

interpretations of Hume. Global reductionists argue there is good reason to trust testimony in general and trust in specific testifiers is derived from this global claim. Coady takes Hume to be committed to this kind of reductionism. '[T]he usual conformity of facts to the reports of witnesses' (EHU 10.5) provides evidence that testimony is in general reliable and this evidence justifies beliefs in what particular speakers say or what is written. Coady (1992, 79–100), though, argues that such an account is unsustainable. He highlights what he sees as a 'fatal ambiguity' in Hume's discussion (1992, 80–5). Hume says that '*our* assurance…is derived from no other principle than *our* observation of the veracity of human testimony' (EHU 10.5; my italics), but whose assurance and whose observations is Hume referring to here? He could be using 'our observation' in a rhetorical sense (Shieber 2015, 63), referring to the experiences of different individuals: to his experience and how it grounds his assurance, and to his readers' experience and how it grounds their assurance. The particular examples that he uses, though, suggest that this is not what he intends. When he speaks of 'a uniform experience' against resurrection, he is not merely claiming that he and his readers have not witnessed such an event, but that this 'has *never* been observed in any age or country' (EHU 10.12). He is using 'our' observation in a 'distributive' (Shieber 2015, 63), 'pooled' (Gelfert 2010, 69) or 'collective' sense (Schmitt 1987, 75n5): *no-one* has witnessed such an event. Coady argues that ambiguity between the rhetorical and collective senses of 'our experience' undermines Hume's account of testimony. Hume's empiricism demands that his account relies on the experience of an individual, but the testimonial beliefs Hume takes us to acquire depend on the latter, collective notion. One cannot, though, depend on the latter notion without begging the question; without assuming, that is, that all the testimonial evidence is at odds with miracle-testimony and that all such testimonial evidence is reliable. Coady's argument is seen by many as fatal to what he sees as Hume's global reductionist account of testimony.

Alternatively, one can interpret Hume as a local reductionist. Fricker draws a distinction between the developmental and mature phases of how one comes to trust the testimony of others. In the developmental phase, as children, we have no choice but to take much of what we believe about the world on trust: 'Simply-trusted testimony plays an inevitable role in the causal process by which we become masters of our commonsense scheme of things' (Fricker 1995, 403), and Hume does note that children 'implicitly embrace every opinion propos'd to them' (T 2.1.11.2). Once such *default trust* has established a coherent picture of the world, then there is an imperative to check the credentials of the testimony we hear or read *for ourselves* as we enter the mature phase of our trust in others. The kind of default trust that is necessary in the developmental phase cannot be maintained since '[w]e know too much about human nature to want to

trust anyone, let alone everyone, uncritically' (Fricker 1995, 401). In order therefore for our testimonial beliefs to be justified, 'the hearer must always be monitoring the speaker critically', looking for 'signs of untrustworthiness' such as intoxication, nervousness, confusion, lack of eye contact, twitching and suchlike (Fricker 1994, 154). On a local reductionist reading of Hume, the ambiguity in his use of 'our observation' and 'our assurance' would not be fatal. The references to collective experience reflect beliefs acquired in the developmental phase, those that can be interrogated in the mature phase in order to validate the credentials of specific testifiers. Hume alerts us to be sensitive to speakers who 'deliver their testimony with hesitation, or on the contrary, with too violent asseverations' (EHU 10.7). The justification acquired from such monitoring is local, concerning the particular speaker in question and the circumstances of their utterance; it does not require any commitment to the global claim that we are justified in believing testimony in general.

Axel Gelfert claims that Hume's position 'may be closest' (2010, 73) to local reductionism, but argues that local reductionism is untenable. He notes that '"developmental" phases occur throughout our epistemic lives'—and not merely in an early period of immature default trust—and in such phases 'an agent will have to acquire new epistemic standards and criteria of trustworthiness, and one's grounds for trusting the new testimony cannot be expected to reduce to previously acquired criteria and heuristics' (2009, 185–6). I take Hume to allow for the continual possibility of refining one's epistemic standards and argue that this is a feature of his anti-reductionist epistemology of testimony.

According to Hume we sometimes draw rash generalizations. Having never met an Irishman with wit or mental agility (Hume's example), we may infer that all Irishmen lack intelligence. Such prejudices, however, can be corrected by general rules of an epistemically superior kind (T 1.3.13.7). Such 'unphilosophical probability' is therefore seen as standing in need of correction by 'general rules' or more philosophical ways of thinking. In his essay 'On National Characters' Hume says it is the 'vulgar' and uneducated who 'carry all *national characters* to extremes; and having once established it as a principle, that any people are knavish, or cowardly, or ignorant, they will admit of no exception, but comprehend every individual under the same censure' (Hume E197). Hume, however, allows that the vulgar can be educated and that prejudices can be overturned. Further, revision of one's opinions is not something that one can always manage on one's own. Initial faith in others is required, initial faith that is not confined to a single developmental phase. To learn about wine and what makes for a good vintage, we need to trust in experts or wine connoisseurs, and we need to trust those who tell us who those 'true judges' are, and to trust their statements regarding the quality of a particular vintage and

the flavours of which it is composed. We may not taste the leather until it is pointed out. In doing so we come to acquire, through experience, 'delicacy of taste' (Hume E237)[4] along with a whole range of general rules concerning particular kinds of wine-testimony. Without the initial trust in experts, though, experience could not have equipped us with such refined abilities to assess this kind of testimony. The acquisition of epistemic standards relevant to different kinds of testimony is not restricted to childhood or to a time-limited developmental phase. Throughout our lives we must at times be open to trust (in the absence of reductive evidence) in order to be receptive to testimony concerning new domains. This is at odds with local reductionism where such default trust is insulated in the developmental phase. Gelfert suggests that if such standards are wholly established in the developmental phase, this would 'severely impair[] the possibility of rationally adjusting, in the light of warranted criticism and correction by others, one's habitual response to testimony' (2009, 189). He argues that local reductionism is unstable and those tempted by this approach must either reject reductionism or embrace the sceptical claim that belief in testimony is not justified. It is implausible to offer a sceptical interpretation of Hume given that it is clear that he draws a distinction between testimony that should be trusted and that which should not, miracle-testimony being a case of the latter. For Hume, though, the developmental phase border can be breached and default trust has a role in one's epistemic maturity; I therefore embrace Gelfert's first option and see Hume as rejecting reductionism.[5]

Gelfert's (2010) interpretation of Hume is similar to mine in various ways. He argues that focusing on the first *Enquiry* distorts our interpretation of Hume on testimony and he draws more widely on Hume's works to support his interpretation. He also responds to Coady's accusation of ambiguity by taking Hume to see experience in a collective or pooled sense. Such collective experience supports his claim, in a later work, that a

> hearer can draw on his background knowledge of human nature and the social world—much of it itself due to testimony—and in many cases can simply trust his tacit understanding of the various practices of giving and receiving information.
>
> (Gelfert 2014, 122)

Collective experience, which provides us with knowledge of human nature, is acquired 'simply through immersion in the social world' (Gelfert 2010, 71), and below we shall see the role played here by the testimony of history with its capacity to 'extend[] our experience to all past ages' (Hume E566).[6] Gelfert therefore argues that the received, global reductionist view of Hume 'is inaccurate at best, and misleading at worst' (2010, 60), also

noting that 'global reductionism…is regarded as a non-starter by most contributors to the [contemporary] debate' (2014, 107). As we have seen, though, he holds back from an anti-reductionist interpretation of Hume, tentatively offering a local reductionist interpretation instead. I reject such an interpretation on the grounds that Hume allows for the continual possibility of refining our epistemic standards and that he does not accept that a sharp line can be drawn between developmental and mature phases of trust in testimony, a line that is central to local reductionism.

Anti-reductionists take testimony to be a fundamental source of knowledge, alongside and not reducible to perception, inference and memory. Anti-reductionists are also called 'fundamentalists' (Graham, 2006), 'credulists' (Pritchard 2006, 21) and 'presumptive right' theorists. Here is Fricker articulating the approach:

> *PR* [Presumptive Right] *thesis:* On any occasion of testimony, the hearer has the epistemic right to assume, without evidence, that the speaker is trustworthy, i.e., that what she says will be true, unless there are special circumstances which defeat this presumption.
>
> (1994, 125)

Local reductionists argue that mature-stage beliefs are only justified if the requisite monitoring and assessment of standards occurs, with such scrutiny not required in the developmental phase. Anti-reductionists, however, take it that we have default justification in all cases of testimony.

Some anti-reductionists present transcendental arguments for default trust based on Donald Davidson's (1984) claim that understanding others demands the assumption of rationality which itself relies on the assumption that the beliefs of others are mostly true and should therefore be trusted. Tyler Burge (1993), for example, argues that intelligible propositions display rationality and are therefore prima facie credible. Burge's approach, though, is profoundly anti-Humean. Burge, following Davidson, draws an a priori connection between rationality and truth. Such an inference is not available to Hume or it's not one he would accept. Hume provides a naturalistic account of rationality that includes the canons of good causal reasoning mediated by general rules. We cannot know a priori that such rationality is likely to lead to true beliefs.

We find another kind of anti-reductionism at odds with central features of Hume's philosophy in the work of Hume's contemporary, Thomas Reid, and today's debate concerning reduction in the epistemology of testimony is sometimes painted as reflecting the eighteenth-century views of Hume the reductionist and Reid the anti-reductionist. Reid (1983) argues that we should always accept someone's testimony unless we have good reason to suspect that a particular report is false. The presumptive right to trust

is justified by the co-ordination of two principles of human nature, the principles of veracity and credulity. Given that human beings are disposed to tell the truth, it is epistemically justified to have default trust in what they say. These principles are the 'gift of nature' and the 'natural issue' of the mind, and this is understood in teleological terms, in terms, that is, of how we were created by God. Such an approach could not inform an anti-reductionist interpretation of Hume given his hostility towards teleological and theological considerations.

My anti-reductionist interpretation of Hume is distinct from such approaches. In order to understand Hume's attitude to testimony, we need to look wider than the miracles essay, since his treatment of testimony in this particular religious context should not be seen as shaping a Humean epistemology of testimony that applies generally across contexts. Hume considers the testimony of history, conversations between friends, ancient oratory and testimony involved in moral and aesthetic education, and we should look closely at what he says about these kinds of communication rather than limit the evidence for our interpretation to those rare cases where testimony concerns miracles. When we do so, we come to see that Hume has a richer account of testimony than that discussed under his name in the contemporary debate. We find that Hume's epistemology of testimony is integrated with his account of how history informs our knowledge of human nature, the relations between sympathy, belief and virtue, and the interpersonal dimension of testimonial trust.

In the *Treatise* and in its treatment of historical testimony, we start to find evidence for anti-reductionism. At *Treatise* 1.3.4.1 Hume introduces the belief that Caesar was killed in the Senate House on the Ides of March. This is a testimonial belief, one passed to us down a very long chain of transmission. Hume, though, seems to highlight an epistemic problem with such historical belief. To assess the plausibility of such a claim, it could be thought that we need to assess the reliability of each link in the testimonial chain, each assessment providing a probability concerning, for example, 'the fidelity of printers and copyists'. However, '[e]very new probability diminishes the original conviction' and this consideration of the 'millions' of links in the chain would lead to it being the case that

> the evidence of all antient history must now be lost or at least will be lost in time.…This may be consider'd only in a certain vivacity, convey'd from an original impression, it would decay by the length of the transition, and must at last be extinguished.
>
> (T 1.3.13.4)

There are various interpretations of what Hume is suggesting here. Elizabeth Anscombe (1973), for example, implausibly takes Hume to

be arguing for scepticism concerning the testimony of history. Donald Livingston, however, argues that sceptical consequences should not be drawn because

> our belief in the existence of Caesar is grounded in a fundamental belief in the historians who have written the book we are reading and not in a conclusion reached by inference through the links in a chain of record. (1974, 17)

We assume that historical chains of transmission have been in the main reliable:

> Belief in recorded history is on the whole a belief *that there has been* a chain of tradition of reports and records going back to contemporary knowledge; it is not a belief in the historical facts by an inference that passes through the links of such a chain. (1974, 14)

When one reads a text as a history book, one takes there to be a testimonial chain of transmission, and our default position—unless something raises our suspicions—is to take this chain to be reliable. Livingston's '*fundamental belief* in the historians who have written the book' (1974, 17; my italics) should be read as a default account of testimonial trust, one in which we should trust testimony unless we have specific reasons not to. I take such default trust in history to underpin an anti-reductionist interpretation of Hume on testimony in general.

For any anti-reductionist account of testimony, there arises the problem of gullibility and this is also the case with respect to the testimony of history. There is, though, a distinction between default acceptance of testimony and gullibility, and anti-reductionists can avoid the latter if there are mechanisms to alert us to when our default trust in testimony should be overridden. Hume has just such resources. We can discover red flags that prompt us to look more closely at certain links in the testimonial chain. We therefore learn to be selective concerning which historical testimonies we trust. Suspicions are raised, as we have seen in the limit case of miracles, when reported events are objectively unlikely. Trust in history should not be blind and Hume identifies defeaters to which we should be sensitive. Hume says that we should be wary of testimony given by those

> of a doubtful character; when they have an interest in what they affirm; when they deliver their testimony with hesitation, or on the contrary with too violent asseverations. There are many other particulars of the

> same kind, which may diminish or destroy the force of any argument from human testimony.
>
> (EHU 10.7)

Note, though, that knowledge of such defeaters is also something that can be acquired through trust in history. What we see in Hume's account of testimony is a rejection of a foundationalist picture in which testimonial justification is reducible to an individual's perception of the reliability of others. In order to assess such reliability, we require a theory of human nature, one derived from our observations of 'men's behaviour in company, in affairs, and in their pleasures' (T 0.10), but also one that requires us to take historical testimony on trust and thus to greatly expand the scope of empirical evidence available to us. Testimonial justification does not have a foundation in *pure*, testimony-independent perceptions of the constant conjunctions between the contents of utterances and reality, but neither does history provide ultimate foundations for our theory of human nature, independent of our ongoing experience. History informs our understanding of human nature upon which testimonial trust depends *and* the resultant account of human nature, along with our first-hand experience, guides our interpretation of history: 'What would become of *history*, had we not a dependence on the veracity of the historian, according to the experience, which we have had of mankind?' (EHU 8.18). The reductionist 'Humean' interpretation of Hume on testimony is at odds with Hume's situated view of humanity. It assumes, as Livingston puts it, 'some Archimedean point outside the prejudices and customs of common life from which the order as a whole can be judged' (2010, 6), a point from which individuals abstract themselves from the fray, and attain, with their own resources, epistemic authority concerning the reliability of others. Such a point is unattainable. We have no choice but to trust in history and in the testimony of others, perhaps most of the time, only questioning their authority when the stakes are high—in the case of miracles, for example—but, even then, the epistemic resources we bring to bear are infused with knowledge that we have ultimately acquired on trust.

Anti-reductionist interpretations of Hume can avoid Coady's accusations of ambiguity and begging the question. As we saw earlier, 'our assurance' and 'our observation' could be taken rhetorically, as referring to Hume's personal experience and his readers' experiences, or they could be interpreted as referring to collective or pooled experience. Coady takes the latter interpretation to be indefensible as this would involve Hume begging the question, that is, Hume would be assuming that the testimony of others is uniform and reliable. I argue, though, that Hume embraces the collective notions of assurance and observation. That he thinks of experience in collective terms is suggested by his claim in the *Enquiry* that 'books

and conversation enlarge…the sphere of one man's experience' (EHU 9.5n20). Trust in the word of others enables Hume to have a collective notion of experience, with my experience consisting in my own perceptual experience supplemented by the testimonial reports of others.

It is important to be clear on the relation between reductionism, anti-reductionism and inductive inference. Reductionists claim that I am justified in accepting someone's testimony if I have empirical evidence that their testimony is likely to be true. This empirical evidence must also be seen as non-testimonial. I have argued that Hume should not be interpreted in this way. Inductive inference, though, can still play an important role in testimonial exchanges and testimonial trust. Our background theory of human nature is acquired through inductive inference, although the 'experiences' from which the inferences are drawn should not be limited by an individualistic conception of the experiential evidence. We have personal experience of human nature and we have, via testimony, the experiences of others. Such collective experience of testimonial practice results in us, via inductive inference, believing what most people say most of the time, but it also enables us to assess particular cases of testimony when the need arises, applying probabilistic assessments drawn from inductive inferences. It can be assumed that only reductionism allows for the role played by inductive inference in testimonial trust. Peter Millican (2011, 156–8), for example, accepts that 'Hume has no need to dispute the claim that we must start by taking testimony for granted to build our knowledge of the world' (2011, 158) but sees this as compatible with the reductionism that must be adopted given the role played by induction in Hume's discussion of miracles. Inductive inference, however, is also compatible with anti-reductionism. Reductionism with respect to testimony is the claim that the trust we place in others is justified in virtue of an individual's experience of the reliability of testifiers. For Hume, though, the evidential base for inductive inference can include collective experience and so inductive inference can also play important roles in an anti-reductionist epistemology of testimony.

There is a third contemporary approach to testimony, distinct from both reductionism and anti-reductionism, and this is taken by those who offer trust-based or interpersonal accounts of testimony.[7] These distinguish trust from mere reliance, and I suggest that some aspects of these accounts can be seen as reflected in Hume's anti-reductionism.

Rock climbers trust both the rope to hold their weight and their climbing partner to firmly hold the rope and to testify truthfully that it is safe to climb. These are distinct kinds of trust. They may rely on the rope because they have good empirical evidence that this brand and thickness of rope has been reliable in the past, and they also rely on their partner's testimony partly in virtue of their past reliability. There is, however, a difference

between reliance on the rope and trust in a partner, and that can be shown by thinking about the kind of response that would be appropriate if one's trust were misplaced. Richard Holton puts this well:

> When you trust someone to do something, you rely on them to do it, and you regard that reliance in a certain way: you have a readiness to feel betrayal should it be disappointed, and gratitude should it be upheld….When the car breaks down we might be angry: but when a friend lets us down we feel betrayed.
>
> (1994, 67)

To trust someone is to treat them as *a person*, and that's the case when you trust someone to do something and when you trust what they say. As Pamela Hieronymi says, 'if you are simply treating her utterance as reliable evidence, calculating the likelihood of her veracity, then you are precisely *not* trusting her. You are instead treating her like a good thermometer' (2008, 222). At times we can rely on the word of another just as we rely on a rope, but at other times we trust another as a person. In trusting in this way we adopt the 'participant stance' (Holton 1994, 67) and are disposed to form 'reactive attitudes' towards them (Strawson 2008). You may feel gratitude if a friend reveals to you a sensitive truth, proud of your child's eloquent testimony, or resentment and anger if you are lied to.

There are two ways of developing accounts of this distinctive kind of trust.[8] According to the non-cognitivist approach, trust is not itself a belief in what the other says, but a distinct attitude towards them, an attitude that one can choose to adopt even in the face of evidence that the speaker is unreliable. Such accounts face a problem, though, in that such attitudes may reflect our personal relationships or our moral attitude towards others, but it's not clear that they have epistemic significance. I'm proud of my child's testimony because it is eloquent and because he's my son, but these alone do not give me reason to think his testimony is true. The climber could trust their partner and adopt the participant stance towards them for various kinds of non-epistemic reasons—they could be a friend, perhaps, or a member of their climbing club, or simply a fellow human being—but it is not clear how adoption of the participant stance could help to justify my testimonial beliefs in the absence of epistemic reasons to trust them based on their reliability.

There are also cognitivist accounts of the distinctive nature of interpersonal trust in which trust is a kind of belief based on reasons for which one has evidence. Trust is epistemic, but it can also be interpersonal. I suggest that Hume can be seen as having this kind of account and this becomes clear when we consider the various roles that sympathy and the virtues play in Hume's epistemology.

Virtues are character traits that are useful and agreeable to ourselves and others and we can ascribe these to each other because we are capable of sympathizing with the effects of such traits on the person who has them and on the society in which they live. Virtue is a broad category that encompasses traditional *moral* virtues, but also '*intellectual*… endowments' (EPM App. 4.2). Such intellectual virtues play various roles in the acquisition of knowledge and help secure one's practical goals, and in so doing they can be seen by others as traits worthy of respect and as 'the source of that trust and confidence, which can alone give a man any consideration in life' (EPM 6.13). It is good, for example, to show 'industry' in acquiring knowledge, and other epistemically praiseworthy traits include 'penetration' and 'courage of mind', which consists in the ability to go out on a limb and defend one's views in the face of opposition.[9] In the moral *Enquiry* Hume praises 'that sagacity, which leads to the discovery of truth', 'perseverance,…quickness of conception, facility of expression', 'ingenuity', creativity or 'fertility of invention', 'good sense, and sound reasoning'.[10]

Paul Faulkner (1998) and Gelfert (2010) stress that reductionists place too much emphasis on the reliability of particular testifiers. Hume, rather, focuses on the usually two-stage nature of trust. First, we acquire evidence concerning facets of human nature such as the intellectual virtues: it is 'our *experience* of the governing principles of human nature, which gives us any assurance of the veracity of men' (T 1.3.9.12). Second, it is this kind of knowledge that we put to use on particular occasions, both to explain how testimonial beliefs are acquired and why we are justified in trusting some sources of testimony and not others. Such facets of human nature and the general rules concerning testimonial trust that are derived from them are 'discovered by experience', both in the personal sense and in the collective sense, often through history. History provides 'so many collections of *experiments*' by which we can come to account for human nature 'in the same manner as the physician or natural philosopher becomes acquainted with the nature of plants, minerals, and other external objects', 'furnishing us with materials, from which we form our *observations*' (EHU 8.7; my italics). History provides us with knowledge of events that occurred in the past, but also of the characters, foibles and thoughts of those who lived through such events and brought them about. History thus informs our account of human nature and it therefore contributes to our assessments of who we take to be trustworthy. The relation between our engagement with history and the knowledge we have of our contemporaries is holistic. The actions of those in the past enable us to make inferences concerning how people will continue to act today, but contemporary evidence of human nature can also be used to interpret the past.

I suggest that sympathetic engagement with the characters of testifiers is akin to adopting the participant stance. My interlocutor is not just a reliable speaker, whom I engage with as I would with a thermometer or reliable rope, but an honest, lively and witty person, the latter virtues I am capable of appreciating through sympathy. It is certainly true that, according to Hume, evidence concerning the objective unlikeliness of miraculous *events* plays a crucial role in our assessment of miracle-testimony, always, it seems, swamping the trust we may have in a text or *person*. He also, though, provides detailed character analysis of the kinds of traits that are relevant to the assessment of testimony, those possessed by testifiers and those constitutive of the character of the witnesses of alleged miracles. Character traits are traits of people, not of events. Crucially, though, such sympathetic engagement has an epistemic dimension and provides a new source of evidence concerning the reliability of testifiers.[11]

Some epistemically virtuous traits lend themselves to a reductionist interpretation, that is, the possession of such traits could be assessed purely in terms of the reliability of speakers or witnesses. There are, for example, those with 'tenacious' memory or an 'inclination to truth'.[12] It is harder, though, to see others in a wholly reductionist light, those such as probity, integrity and candour, or for there to be a reliabilist reduction of how testifiers are 'sensible to shame when detected in a falsehood'[13] or of the possession of vigilance, sagacity, wisdom or sense. There are, though, various kinds of indirect evidence of reliability. Sarah Wright suggests that 'if I have evidence that someone has a history of returning borrowed items, I have evidence that this person has the kind of competence that would also make her a good source of testimony' (2011, 259). There are also causal relations between reliable traits and the virtues. Someone who is vain may think he is always right and ignore the testimony of others: vanity is therefore unlikely to be accompanied by open-mindedness. Pride leads to courage, magnanimity and ambition, and we find that honesty is often accompanied by understanding and industry.[14] Dogmatism—a cardinal epistemic vice for Hume—leads to impatience.[15] Not all intellectual virtues are keyed to reliability, but there is, Wright argues, 'weak reciprocity' between the moral and intellectual virtues and between virtues and reliable causal reasoning (2011, 257–60). Wright therefore argues that 'we have available a variety of new sources of information about both the honesty and competence of speakers' (2011, 259). The more we know about the character of a thinker, the more evidence we have that is relevant to assessing their testimony. Wright takes such weak reciprocity to support a reductionist interpretation of Hume, in that the evidence base for trust is now wider. Weak reciprocity entails that trustworthiness is built into the notion we have of ourselves and others. If others come to see you as courageous and benevolent, then this will provide them with some

evidence that you are reliable. Weak reciprocity can also play a role in my anti-reductionist interpretation. The more knowledge we have of human nature in general, that informed by default trust in history and collective experience, the more sensitive we become to factors relevant to testimonial trust. Trust in testimony does not have teleological backing, as it does for Reid, nor a priori, transcendental backing, as it does for Burge. Its source, for Hume, can only be in experience and our experience, both personal and collective, provides us with rich resources for the assessment of the testimony of others. Such an account is epistemic and it also shows how trust in another is distinctly personal and distinct from mere reliance.

Notes

1 This paper is in part a précis of my *Hume on Testimony* (Routledge 2022), but it also develops the trust-based account of Hume on testimony that I suggest in that work.
2 See Hume (LDH 1.330–331, 1.399–400, 2.310–311).
3 In the *Treatise* Hume suggests that the same kind of assessment should be given of the testimony of travellers who say that they have returned, improbably, from lands where fruits ripen in winter and perish in summer (T 2.3.1.10).
4 Hume, 'Of the Standard of Taste'.
5 Saul Traiger (1993) and Michael Welbourne (2002) also reject the reductionist interpretation of Hume. Their arguments, though, are distinct in certain ways from mine and from those of each other. See O'Brien (2022, 67–9, 94).
6 Hume 'Of the Study of History'.
7 See Lackey (2008, Ch. 8).
8 See McMyler and Adebayo (2018, 219).
9 H 4.351, 2.126, 2.419.
10 EPM App. 4.11, 6.21, App. 4.3; DNR 7.18, EPM 8.7.
11 Some testimonial beliefs are also acquired via the kind of sympathetic mechanisms that Hume takes to be involved in the sharing of emotions. See O'Brien (2022, Ch. 4) and Lenz (2022, 164–9).
12 T 3.3.1.24; EHU 10.5.
13 EHU 10.5.
14 See Hume EPM App. 4.2.
15 See Hume H 3.431–2.

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